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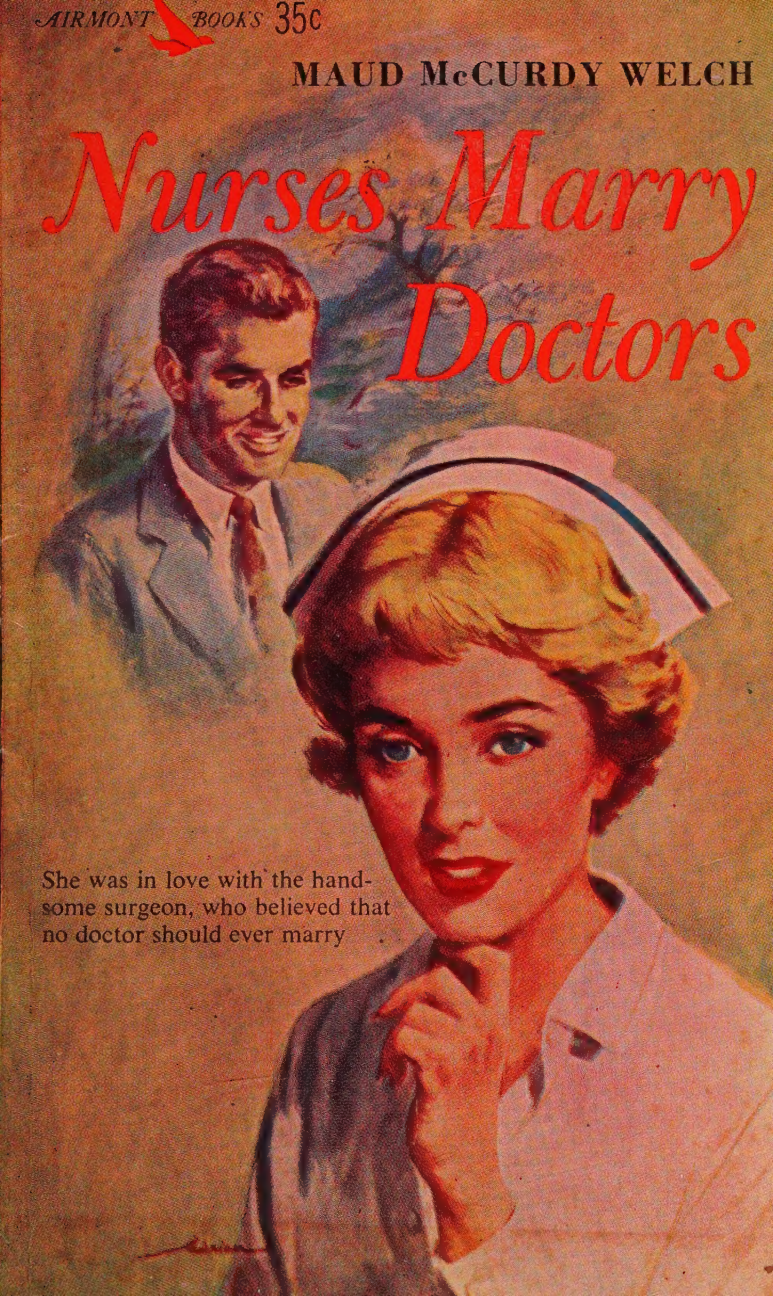
Nurses Marry Doctors



She was in love with the handsome surgeon, who believed that no doctor should ever marry

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Betty Loomer

NURSES MARRY DOCTORS

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Maud McCurdy Welch

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NURSES MARRY DOCTORS

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CHAPTER ONE

There was a late afternoon quiet about the Bennett Memorial Hospital after the long, hectic day. Linda Stephens was ready to go off-duty, but she couldn't resist waiting a minute or so in the small, third-floor office. Dr. Julian Paige might just possibly come in for a breathing spell.

Linda tucked a brown-gold curl behind her ear and frowned at the small, piquant face that looked back at her from the wall mirror. "What a shower and fresh clothes could do for you!" she told herself as she turned from the mirror, suddenly deciding to leave. She knew why she had waited for Julian. She wanted to see him, if only for a moment. And this was plain silly. Half the time, Julian didn't even know she was in the world. And if he had instructions for her, he would leave them on the desk.

As she started to the door, the telephone rang for the second time in the last ten minutes. Linda went back and lifted the receiver.

"Bennett Memorial. Linda Stephens speaking."

It was the same voice as before. "I'd like to speak to Doctor Julian Paige." And no fooling around, the young voice seemed to say.

"I'm sorry. Doctor Paige is still busy."

"I'll bet you are not!" the voice retorted, then added with determination, "Will you be good enough to tell him Elaine Bryson wants to speak to him at once?"

"Doctor Paige cannot be disturbed at the moment. Perhaps you'll leave your number."

"Perhaps I won't! I think you're deliberately keeping me from talking to him." Before Linda could say anything, the instrument was slammed down on its cradle.

"The darned little spitfire!" Linda rubbed her ear.

At that moment a masculine voice exclaimed, "What goes on? Did you hurt yourself?"

Linda looked up into Julian Paige's thin, sun-tanned face. "It's nothing," she said. "Miss Elaine Bryson wants to speak to you pronto and at once."

Julian groaned, and sank into a chair. "A pox on her."

"Good night," Linda said, starting for the door.

Julian's eyes narrowed. "What's your hurry?" he asked.

Linda turned. "Is there anything I can do for you, Doctor?" she questioned in her best nurse-to-doctor voice.

"You could sit down for a moment and let me look at you. You know, it's really ridiculous the way I like looking at you." He was smiling and there was a teasing light in his blue eyes.

"You're the one that's ridiculous," Linda retorted with a smile. She came back from the door, sat down in one of the leather chairs and looked at him.

His white T-shirt was unbuttoned and his stethoscope was still around his neck. There was a tiny spatter of freckles on his face and his dark hair was tousled, as usual, partly because he had a way of running his fingers through it when he was thinking and partly because his hair was inclined to wave.

Maybe, after all, Julian did want to talk to her. Occasionally, when they could find time, they discussed things that had come up in the hospital during the

day. She'd stay as long as he wanted her to, tired as she was with the daylong routine of virus cases, fractures, and tonsillectomies.

Julian leaned back tiredly. There had been two emergencies today and this was probably his first breathing spell since morning, Linda thought.

Suddenly he took his hands from his eyes and smiled at her. "Hi, Linda! There's something—"

The phone rang again and Julian held up his hand. "If that's Elaine, tell her I've gone to Timbuctoo."

"Bennett Memorial. Linda Stephens speaking."

"I want to speak to Doctor Julian Paige," the young voice said again with a slow, angry emphasis.

"Doctor Paige is still busy." Linda flashed Julian a smile.

"I don't believe you. You're just trying to—"

Linda held the receiver over the cradle and let it come down with a gentle crash. She heard Julian give a chuckle.

"I shouldn't have done that," she said. "I could probably get fired for it." She put her finger against her ear again and rubbed it gently.

"Does it really hurt?" Julian wanted to know.

"Oh, no. Not really."

"Elaine's just a spoiled kid. Believe it or not, I hardly know her."

"From the tone of her voice, she evidently has a different impression."

Julian frowned. "I went on a date with her to oblige Phil. He dates Stella, her older sister. After that, Elaine started calling me." Dr. Phil Manley was also on the staff at Bennett.

"Well, good night," Linda said again as she turned toward the door. "It's almost seven."

Julian looked at his wristwatch. "Quarter to," he corrected. "I've got a little more than an hour, Linda. How about going up to Jimmy's Drive-In with me?"

"You ought to have a real dinner," she protested.

"There isn't time to get dressed and go uptown. I have a consultation at eight with Doctor Edson and Doctor Wright. Doctor Wright's coming over from State Hospital."

This was very important, Linda knew. Dr. Edson was the head of the hospital and Dr. Wright an eye, ear and throat specialist. She looked ruefully at her somewhat-wrinkled uniform and gave in. "As long as we don't need to get out of the car, okay."

Julian took off his stethoscope and smoothed his hair. "That's one of the reasons I like you, Linda," he said, as they walked down the corridor to the elevators. "You're always sensible. I might think of a lot of other reasons, if I tried," he added teasingly.

"Don't bother. Too much strain."

Linda waited in front of the big entrance doors while Julian went around to the back where all the staff cars were parked. He was delayed and Linda stood there looking up at the hospital. All the lights were on now.

The hospital was an imposing and graceful building of white-painted brick. It had once been a family mansion. Stately Ionic columns outlined the wide front veranda where there were rocking chairs tipped against the wall. Two floors had been added and two wings, one on the east side and one on the west. The grounds were landscaped and soon spring flowers would be in bloom in the carefully tended beds.

Instead of the usual dormitories, Bennett had a number of small cottages for the nurses and a few staff members, some of them almost hidden by trees and shrubs.

The hospital was old-fashioned in many ways, but it was very modern in equipment and treatments. It had been richly endowed by the millionaire Bennett family and Linda, who had come here as a staff nurse

only a few months after graduating from a nursing school and hospital in St. Louis, had found it a pleasant place in which to work.

She heard the sound of wheels and Julian's Buick came down the white chat drive.

"Phil stopped me," he explained, when Linda jumped in beside him. "Wanted to know why I wouldn't go out with him and Stella and Elaine. He's a determined chap, isn't he?"

"He certainly is," Linda agreed with emphasis. She knew from personal experience about Phil's determination.

At Jimmy's Drive-In, Jimmy himself came out to serve them, smiling all over his good-natured face. "Hi, Doc! How're you, Miss Linda? What'll it be?"

"How about a steak sandwich?" Julian asked Linda.

"Fine. With lettuce and tomatoes. And I'll have milk."

"That's for babies," Julian teased. Jimmy trotted back into the building and Julian went on, "I'll take you out to dinner to a real place soon. We'll get into civilized clothes and pretend we're like other people."

"There's a rule at Bennett, isn't there, that doctors and nurses shouldn't have dates?" Linda's voice was teasing again.

Julian grinned. "I seem to have heard about it—vaguely. But if there is a rule, we'll just ignore it."

Jimmy appeared with the sandwiches, sizzling-hot between two slices of toasted oversize bread. He'd brought two trays, which he attached to the car. Milk for Linda, coffee for Julian.

They ate the sandwiches with relish, talking very little. When they'd finished and Linda had used the huge paper napkin on her lips, Julian said, "Could you manage another?"

"Oh, no. But you go ahead."

Julian looked at his watch and shook his head. "No time, darn it."

Linda was sure Julian hadn't had enough food and he might be on duty half the night. She'd baked some pies that morning before going on duty. Apple, the kind most men prefer. She decided to give one to him. Surely he could find time during the night to eat it.

Julian seemed relaxed at the wheel. "Linda, whenever Elaine calls—any time, any hour—I'm definitely not in."

"You're the doctor," Linda said lightly.

"I doubt if she's even eighteen and she thinks she's got a crush on me. It's getting to be embarrassing. She'll soon forget it; you know how kids are."

And she'll hate me, Linda thought to herself. This was the first time such a young girl had gotten a crush on Julian, but several of his patients had become so interested in him, they were very reluctant to leave when they were ready to be discharged.

There was something about Julian that women seemed to find irresistible. The whole staff teased him about his power over women.

"Fix it for me, won't you?" Julian asked, trying to smooth down his hair again. "I know I depend on you too much," he added.

"I'll do what I can," Linda promised, but the idea wasn't very appealing.

Sometimes Linda thought that Julian might be a little naïve about women. Sometimes it placed her in an uncomfortable position when she had to make excuses for him. Nearly all the girls who called Julian blamed Linda when he refused to answer. Once, one of them had said resignedly when she told her Dr. Paige was busy, "Oh, well, you're in love with him too. That's why you won't call him to the phone."

And of course it wasn't true. . . .

Julian was stopping the car in front of the cottage where Linda lived with Karen Winslow, another nurse. "Well, here we are, and five minutes left to go. Wish we could spend the evening together. I'd like to talk shop with you."

Linda was out of the car before he could help her. "Just a minute," she called back, and disappeared into the cottage. She came back with a neatly wrapped package. "It's a pie. Not a very big one. I'm sure you can eat it all."

"I could eat it all if it were as big as a pumpkin." Julian laughed. "Home cooking! When have I heard that word? And when do you ever find time to cook?"

"At night, or early in the mornings. Karen and I get tired of the cafeteria."

Julian was standing beside her now. She looked up at him and said unhappily, "Sometimes I worry about Karen. She's so restless. And she doesn't eat much, or even sleep very well."

"What seems to be wrong?"

Linda shook her head. "I don't know exactly. I heard that she'd been jilted—practically at the altar. She was in love with a doctor. Nurses always seem to fall in love with doctors, don't they?" Then, realizing what she had said, she blushed furiously.

"She should congratulate herself that she didn't marry him," Julian said cynically. "A doctor's wife doesn't have an easy life. No parties together, no home life, just long hours of listening for her husband's car on the driveway." He paused, drew a deep breath, and went on, "I know doctors whose wives have divorced them because they couldn't stand the uncertainty. Never marry a doctor, Linda."

It was a long moment before Linda spoke. Then she said gently, "But if a woman really loves a man, she wouldn't mind waiting for him and being lonely at times."

Julian shot her a quick glance. "There may be a few women like that—but not many." He looked at his watch. "Time's up." His voice sounded disappointed. He started to get in the car but turned back. "Have Karen come to see me. I might be able to help her."

The moon came out suddenly, riding gaily among tossing clouds. For a moment, it shone directly down on Linda's ardent young face. Julian made an impulsive movement toward her, then checked himself. "Thanks for the pie, Linda. Thanks for everything, but most of all for being the kind of girl you are. And don't forget we're going on a real date one of these days."

The car rolled down the white drive and Linda stood there alone. For a moment, while Julian had stood here beside her, it had seemed as if the world belonged to them alone. For just one lovely, precious moment.

CHAPTER TWO

When Linda awakened the next morning, Karen was already buttoning up her uniform, her dark curls neat and shining under her crisp white cap.

"What time is it?" Linda asked, sitting up. "Did I oversleep?"

"No, of course not." Karen's voice was husky-sweet. "I woke up early, couldn't go back to sleep, and decided I might as well get up."

Karen couldn't sleep—that was the trouble, Linda knew. She slid out of her twin bed, wriggled her feet into scuffs and went to the shower. When she came back, Karen was standing at the window, looking out over the landscaped grounds.

She was a strange, rather moody girl with purple-dark eyes and delicate features. Beyond keeping herself exquisitely neat, Karen never seemed to think much about her good looks.

But she was always friendly and a good companion.

When she turned from the window, Linda saw that her eyes were misty with tears. "Do you believe anyone ever really finds happiness?" she asked suddenly. "Real happiness, I mean—the kind that lasts." But before Linda could speak, she answered her own question. "Oh, I believe you are happy. But you're exceptional. The sun always seems to be shining for you. But me—well, I guess I just wasn't intended for happiness."

Linda, who had been brushing her hair, stopped and turned around to look at Karen. "I think you're being too pessimistic. We all have our troubles, but we—we usually bob up, take a long breath and start over again."

"You mean when you lose the man you love, you must find someone else. Peter Travis, for instance." She shook her head slowly. "It just doesn't work out that way." She broke off, then added, "You don't know very much about love, Linda, do you?"

"No. . . . Not from personal experience at least."

"Love isn't just sentimental yearnings and moonlight and roses. It's not like that at all. Sometimes it's just—just pure anguish." Karen's voice broke, then she added briskly, "Let's go."

Linda fitted her cap over her curls and adjusted the skirt of her uniform. "I'm ready," she said.

They went out on the grounds and walked slowly toward the basement cafeteria.

It was a wonderful spring morning. Early sunlight twinkled on the grass, making the dewdrops shine like a million diamonds. From a nearby tree, Linda heard the fluting notes of a redbird's song.

She slipped her arm around Karen. "Life could hold so many wonderful things for you if you'd only let it."

"What?" Karen demanded, slowing up in front of the hospital entrance.

"Friends, music, good fun. Oh, I don't exactly know, but lots of things."

Sometimes it seemed to Linda that Karen was trying to reject life. She was an efficient nurse, but instead of going out in the evenings, she would spend the time moping out on the grounds. She often had invitations from men to go dining and dancing, but as far as Karen was concerned, none of these young men existed.

Linda didn't know too much about Karen. Just that she, like Linda, had come from a small town. Both had lost their parents when young and both had taken their nurse's training in St. Louis. All this had acted as a bond between them.

Sharing a cottage had worked out fine. They had grown genuinely fond of each other and the cottage was like a home. It was very small—a bedroom, a living room with a fireplace, a Pullman kitchenette, a little front porch. The two girls had added bits of color here and there, draperies, cushions for the couch, even hand-hooked rugs for the living room.

They were still standing just outside the doors of the hospital, Linda drinking in the fresh air. But time was rushing by. "We'd better get our breakfast," Linda suggested.

They ran down the short flight of steps to the basement and helped themselves at the steam table, then went to one of the long tables and sat down with their trays.

Jane Bartwell, a retired nurse who lived on the grounds, was just leaving the dining room. Jane was getting a little stout but she was always patient and kind. She told them they needn't hurry, that she'd run up and take over things on the second floor and let the night nurses come on down to breakfast.

"Of course Amy's on the job. Probably been there half the night," she said as she left the room.

Amy was the superintendent, a capable and understanding one. Everybody had a good word for Amy, even Dr. Edson, who was inclined to be short-tempered.

Three night nurses came hurrying in. "I'm starved," Linda heard one of them exclaim. In a few minutes the three had their trays full and had joined Linda and Karen at the long table. Betty Lane,

night nurse on the third floor, started kidding Linda the moment she took her seat.

"The moon sure can play tricks on a girl like you, honey. Better watch your step."

"What moon? What tricks?" Linda asked.

"As if you didn't know. I saw you and Julian Paige last night out at Jimmy's. And this morning you look as if you'd caught a handful of stars and pulled them down to earth. It's easy to put two and two together, baby."

"But they don't add up, darling," Linda said, smiling.

"Didn't he kiss you? Now don't tell me he didn't. I just wouldn't believe you."

"Believe it or not, he didn't. I was in my little bed before nine o'clock, reading a good book."

Betty tossed her head. "Anybody that believes that can go jump in the river."

Linda was conscious of Karen's eyes on her as they left the cafeteria and went up the short flight of stairs to the main floor, then caught the elevator to the second.

Karen said in a whisper, "Betty's just jealous. Don't pay any attention to her." Then she added quickly, "But whatever you do, don't fall in love with Julian Paige—with any doctor. These doctor-and-nurse affairs never last, and it's always the nurse who gets lost in the shuffle. Believe me, honey, *I know*."

"But nurses *do* marry doctors," Linda protested. "And it usually works out, too."

Linda stopped at the desk to see if Amy had any instructions. Then she started on her rounds, going first into 244, where a young man—really just a boy—lay staring up at the ceiling. At first, Tommy had resented being in the hospital and had pleaded with the doctors to send him home, saying there was nothing wrong with him. Now, nothing seemed to matter

"Well, Tommy," Linda said cheerfully, "how's things?"

"Okay, I guess," he murmured, and added listlessly, "I've had my shower."

"That's good. Now, what's for breakfast?"

The boy moved restively. "Oh, anything."

"Well, I'll be back in a jiffy." Linda went to the diet kitchen and returned with a tray containing tomato juice, a poached egg on toast, and a glass of milk.

Tommy looked at the food with distaste, but Linda sat down beside his bed and tried to coax him to eat.

"Please, I don't want anything," he begged.

"But you *will* drink your milk?"

He nodded. "Yes, to please you."

When Tommy had finished the glass of milk, Linda picked up the tray. She was headed for the door when Phil Manley came in, immaculate in whites. He smiled at Linda, his dark eyes admiring her trim figure. "Good morning, Miss Stephens."

"Good morning, Doctor."

Then she heard Phil say to Tommy, his voice gay and friendly, "I hear the Pelicans are going to put up a real fight tomorrow, but they say they can't win without you."

The Pelicans were the football team in Senior High.

"How about going out there, fellow? Bet you could put the game in the bag."

Tommy drew a quick breath and sat halfway up, his eyes suddenly bright. "But—but how could I?" The hope died in his eyes. "I'm stuck here." Then he sat up very straight, his expression eager. "Do you think I could?"

Linda didn't hear Phil's answer; she was on her way down the corridor to the next patient. But she was surprised at Phil's nonchalant suggestion to

Tommy that he go out to the football field. After all, Tommy was ill, though she had never known exactly what his trouble was. But to tell him to leave his bed and go and play football! She couldn't understand a thing like that. Phil certainly had the queerest ideas.

A student nurse was having a rough time wheeling a stretcher down the corridor and Linda helped her to get it straight. When she was through, Phil was beside her.

"How about Saturday?" he asked.

"I'm tied up. Sorry, Phil."

"No, you're not," he retorted, and walked away.

In Room 200, Linda found her little patient sitting up in bed.

"Hello, Valerie, darling," she said to the fair-haired little girl.

"Hullo, Miss Linda."

"Now we'll have our bath and get all prettied up for Doctor Paige. He'll be along any minute now."

"Please don't make me eat any breakfust," Valerie wailed.

"But you want your breakfast, darling. You know you do."

"No, I don't."

Linda lifted the child and took her to the bath room. After the bath, she combed out the soft curls and tied them back with a blue ribbon. Then she whisked Valerie into fresh pajamas, playfully sprayed her with toilet water, stood off and smiled. "*Now* how do you feel?"

"Pretty good, I guess." She added shyly, "I like the perfume."

"So do I." Linda smiled. "Now we'll see about breakfast."

On the way to the diet kitchen, Linda was wishing she could get some kind of inspiration about Valerie

breakfast. If she could only think of something different, something especially good to tempt the child's appetite. . . .

To her delight, she found something in the diet kitchen she hadn't even hoped for. When she went back to Valerie's room with the tray, she said proudly, 'Look, strawberries! Nice fat ones, red and juicy. Aren't they nice?"

"Real strawberries?" Valerie echoed in surprise. Then her little face crumpled up. "Daddy used to bring me strawberries out of our own patch in South Carolina."

"These came from California," Linda put in quickly. She placed the tray on a table at the side of the bed and sat down. "Now, open your mouth. I'll pop one in."

For a moment, Valerie didn't obey. Then slowly her lips parted. In went a strawberry in a spoonful of cream. "Yummy, isn't it?" Linda smiled.

"Yummy." Valerie even smiled back.

"Now, some milk." Linda lifted the small glass and Valerie obediently sipped it.

"Another strawberry. Open your mouth wide. This is a big one."

Valerie opened her mouth wide and shut her eyes. "It was most as big as a peach," she said when she'd finished it. "Now you eat one."

Linda was saved from answering by Julian's entrance. She rose. "Good morning, Doctor."

Julian nodded, sat down and lifted Valerie's small hand. When he'd finished counting her pulse, he said, "Looks like we're going to have to let our little girl go home soon."

Valerie turned pale. "But I haven't got a home. It was blowed away. I haven't got any mommy or any daddy either."

Julian looked at Linda helplessly, and she came

over and stood close to the bed. "You'll have a lovely home, darling. Maybe a pony to ride and everything a little girl would want."

"I want my mommy and daddy," Valerie sobbed

Julian got up and Linda sat down in the chair he had vacated. She took Valerie's hand in both of hers "Wonder where Sarah-Belle has got to?" she said.

"The night nurse took her away. I—I wanted her to sleep with me."

"We'll find her." Linda got up to look for the doll and Julian motioned her to come to the door.

"Leave off medication for a while and we'll see how she gets along," he said. "Try to find time to get her outside this afternoon if possible. She must learn not to be afraid of the outdoors."

"Yes, Doctor. I'll do my best."

Julian hurried down the corridor and Linda came back in and began looking for the doll. At last she found it in a dresser drawer, hidden underneath Valerie's nightgowns. She held it for the little girl to see and Valerie held out her arms. Then she asked unhappily, "You goin' away now, Miss Linda?"

"Yes, but I'll come back soon, sweetheart. Now you are going to finish your milk, aren't you?"

"I s'pose so," the little girl agreed but without enthusiasm.

It was always difficult for Linda to get Valerie off her mind. Seven-year-old Valerie had lived on a plantation in South Carolina with her parents until that terrible day when a tornado struck. The big house was demolished and Valerie's parents were killed. Valerie had escaped death only because her father had shielded her small body with his own. She hadn't been badly hurt, but was in shock for a long time. It was true that Valerie didn't have a real home. She had an aunt, a Mrs. Crandall, who lived here in town, which was the reason for Valerie being in Ber

nett Hospital, but her aunt had been traveling abroad at the time of the tornado, and no one had been able to reach her.

There was considerable wealth behind Valerie. When she left the hospital, she'd be accompanied by a maid, a governess and probably a nurse. The lawyers handling her aunt's affairs were planning to take her to Mrs. Crandall's home when she was ready to leave the hospital. Linda hoped she wouldn't be too lonely.

It was late afternoon before Linda found time to try to persuade Valerie to go with her for a walk. Linda told her she thought there was a squirrel living down in a tree not far from her bungalow. Maybe they could find him and give him some nuts.

"A real, live squirrel?" Valerie questioned.

Linda nodded.

It was nearly six when they came back to the hospital, Linda still holding Valerie's hand, as the child had insisted she do from the moment they'd stepped out on the grounds. She'd been very nervous at first, but Linda had attracted her attention by showing her a redbird and talking about its nest and how maybe soon there'd be some babies. Valerie began asking questions about the babies and gradually became more relaxed.

Now, as Linda bent over and kissed her good night, she noticed there was a bit of color in the pathetic little face.

The phone rang again just as Linda went out in the corridor. That would be Elaine, she thought; she'd have to make up some kind of an alibi for Julian. But it wasn't. A crisp, finishing-school voice inquired, "May I speak to Doctor Paige?"

Before Linda could reply, Julian walked in. "I'll take it," he said. He'd evidently been expecting the call; he looked pleased and eager.

CHAPTER THREE

It had been a long day. Gray, murky skies, a slow drizzle of rain. Karen and Linda had settled in the cottage for a quiet evening. However, before nine o'clock they both had to get back into uniforms and hurry over to the hospital. There were two emergencies, coming almost at the same minute.

The first one was a group of teen-agers in a souped up car, speeding. The car had skidded and crashed into another car in which a man, his wife and three children were riding.

The other emergency was that of an aged couple going home to their farm in an old-fashioned buggy. The horse, frightened at something on the highway, had bolted, and the two old people had been thrown out.

The nurses were waiting when the ambulance arrived.

Only emergency treatment was given at first. Some were given sedatives and put to bed. The noise was heartbreaking. Children crying, the sobs of their parents. Some had cuts on faces and limbs, others had broken bones. Julian spent an hour picking glass out of one boy's face.

It was after one when Linda was ready to leave. Julian, coming out to smoke a cigarette, walked up beside her as she started down the entrance steps.

"I'll walk over to the cottage with you," he said. He cupped his fingers to light his cigarette and

added, "Sure have needed this. But it's a bad habit, just the same."

During the time they'd worked together in the operating room, Julian hadn't seemed aware of her presence, or of anyone else for that matter. Now he was beginning to relax.

It was a still night. The trees looked dark and secretive, and the air was moist and pleasant as if more rain might be coming.

"Tired?" Julian asked.

"No. Just happy that it wasn't any worse."

"Those kids were lucky. Some of them seem to bear charmed lives—even the lad who had glass in his face. Thank heaven the glass missed his eyes. He'll come out of it practically unscarred. Why are all these teenagers so reckless?"

"Just young. Excited about life, I guess."

Julian nodded. "Life will simmer them down. Marriage, children, responsibilities." He went on after a pause, "I feel keyed-up myself. Like a race horse that's just won or lost a race. If we were like other people, we'd probably be hunting up some night spot in which to spend the evening. Instead, we can't even stay out and have a talk. We've got to get our sleep—and of course there's always something to get settled." He added after a silence, "I keep thinking of you. It must be dull, putting in so much overtime, with no time for fun."

"Oh, we have fun. Sometimes I persuade Karen to go to a movie, when we're sure it's not a Western. Occasionally I have a date."

"Some of your patients, or just Phil?"

"Not—not always with Phil, just now and then."

"But you do like him a lot, don't you?"

"I—well, yes, I do like him in a way," she admitted.

"Then you think you have enough diversion?"

She nodded. "After all, one's work must come first."

"Linda. I never knew a girl quite like you."

She flushed. She didn't know why but she always felt self-conscious when Julian praised her. She said, "Oh, I don't know if I'm really any different. But I know you are. You're absolutely consecrated to your work."

"A doctor has to be. But you're just a kid—you ought to have more fun."

She gave a laugh. "I'm twenty-two and you're all of twenty-eight."

"Sometimes I feel about fifty." He hesitated, went on, "I suppose I should accustom myself to the idea that someday the right man will come along and you'll be leaving Bennett. But it's a very disturbing thought, somehow. I can always depend on you, and that's a great help to a doctor."

"*I* like Bennett, even if it is a gossipy sort of place. We all work together like—well, like one big family."

"Yes," he smiled, "it is something like that." He gave her that searching look of his. "You don't ever mind Doctor Edson's impatience. I could hit him for losing his temper so quickly—and usually over nothing."

"Doctor Edson's getting old. We have to make allowances."

"Linda, you amaze me. I know Edson bawled you out last week for something that wasn't even remotely your fault."

She nodded. "It was just one of those things."

He stood there looking at her silently. At last he said, "Well, we'd better say good night." But he still stood there looking at her. He moved a little nearer, then stepped back and gave a rueful laugh. "I don't know why but I'm always thinking how nice it would be to kiss you. Nothing but propinquity, of course. And I know I'd only get my face slapped."

"You would," she said demurely.

"All right, then, you run along before I decide it would be worth it. And you'd better snatch an extra hour's sleep in the morning. We can manage."

"Thanks, but I won't need it." Linda ran up the steps of the cottage, thinking about that word "propinquity." She wasn't sure she knew its exact meaning.

Karen was in bed, propped up with pillows, reading an astrology magazine. Linda gave her a smiling hello, and thought that she looked different somehow. It was her eyes. They were shining and happy. Something had happened to Karen.

When Linda had said her prayers and jumped in bed, Karen still kept the bed lamp burning, although she wasn't reading the magazine she held in her hand. Finally she said, her voice slow and deep, "Linda, I saw him tonight."

Linda waited for her to go on.

"He came to Bennett during the emergencies. Kerry Lucas." She drew a deep breath, went on, "The man who jilted me."

For a moment, Linda didn't know what to say. "Did he marry someone else?" she finally asked.

Karen nodded. "He married the daughter of a wealthy and very influential doctor. You can see why he thought it was what he wanted."

"If he's married," Linda began hesitantly, "then you really ought to get him out of your mind."

It was a long moment before Karen answered. At last she said, bitterness in her voice, "You can't turn off love like water in a spigot just because you—want to."

"But, darling, you can't just go on grieving your life away, either. There are lots of decent men in the world."

"There's only one man for me," Karen said stubbornly. Then she added, "You're tired. We'd better go to sleep."

"Yes, of course. But, Karen, you must take better care of yourself. A nurse has to keep in top physical condition. If you'd only go to see Julian, he'd give you a tonic, or some vitamins or something."

Karen gave a laugh. "You don't think that would help, now do you? You're like that old fellow in mythology—Atlas, I think it was. You try to carry the troubles of the whole world on your little shoulders."

"Of course I don't. It's just that I like people and I want them to be happy."

"Trying to make people happy is a large order, Linda." Karen snapped out her light, but she wasn't finished. Five minutes passed, ten, then she spoke again, slowly, and with deep conviction. "I know I've got to forget Kerry. I've got to get him out of my mind, my heart and my thoughts. Will you help me, Linda?"

"Of course I will," Linda promised solemnly.

She thought she heard a sudden indrawn sob from Karen, but she said nothing more.

Several days later the two girls were going over to the cafeteria for breakfast when Karen said unexpectedly, "When is Julian Paige's birthday?"

"I'm sure I don't know."

"You must find out." Karen took her arm and they walked on a little more briskly. "You see, I'm beginning to believe you might attract Julian. After all, he's not a push-over like Phil Manley. You might just work it out—if you put your mind to it."

Linda stared at her. "What on earth put such an idea in your head? I admire Julian more than any man I ever knew. But I'm not in love with him. More than half the time he's not even aware of my exis

ence. Don't get any romantic notions about me, honey-child. I want love, a husband, children and all those wonderful things, and I believe someday they'll be mine. But I'll have to wait. There's plenty of time."

When they'd finished their breakfast, they went up to the third floor, where they were greeted by bad news. Amy had been taken ill during the night—stricken with a virus, Sam, the new orderly, told them.

Today Valerie's two guardians from the trust company were to come for her and take her to her new home. But Linda, finding that the little girl had cried herself into a fever, called Julian for a consultation.

"Excitement and fear of the unknown," Julian said. He bent over and whispered to the child, patting her hands gently. Then he gave Linda quiet instructions. "Phone those two men from the bank and explain. She'll have to stay here a little longer."

Julian left and Linda found Valerie looking at her with wide, troubled eyes. "Can I stay here with you, Miss Linda?" she asked.

"Yes, sweetheart. You can stay until—until you want to go."

"But I don't want to go, I want to stay with you all the time."

Linda sat by the child's bed, and talked to her about other things, trying to distract her mind. And finally she saw that Valerie had fallen asleep.

Just as Linda finished with her other patients, Julian beckoned her to come to the office. "Guess you know everything's at sixes and sevens with Amy down," he began. "I'm at my wit's end to find someone to take her place."

"Jane's always around. She's still a good nurse. We can manage until Amy's well again."

Julian frowned thoughtfully. "You work too many hours as it is, but I'll have to take you up on that offer.

Temporarily, at least. Can you and Jane manage until midnight?"

"Certainly we can."

He gave her his quick smile. "You always come up with an answer, Linda. Lordy, I don't know what I'd do without you."

After that, he gave her a few concise instructions and went down to Dr. Edson's office.

Linda took a minute to run in and see Amy, who was on the main floor. But she was sleeping, no doubt under sedatives.

It was a pleasant day. Almost warm. Occasionally there'd be a brief spatter of raindrops, then the sun would come out again.

Linda was in surgery with Dr. Edson at noon, and he reprimanded her twice for not being quick enough with the instruments. She'd slapped them into his hand the moment he was ready, but it was difficult to please Dr. Edson these days.

Late in the afternoon, Linda went into Tommy's room and was surprised to find him gone. Nothing had been said about his leaving when she'd made her rounds that morning.

Bewildered, she turned to leave the room, and found herself looking into the imperious eyes of Mrs. Preston Belfast, Tommy's aunt, with whom he lived. "Where is my nephew? How dare he be moved without consulting *me?*"

"I'm not sure, Mrs. Belfast. Will you wait here until I've made an inquiry?"

She started past the heavy-set woman and almost collided with Phil and Tommy. Tommy's face was aglow with color.

"What does this mean, Doctor Manley? I demand an explanation." Mrs. Belfast's heavy face was crimson with anger.

"Just a bit of therapy," Phil answered easily. "Tommy has been to a football game. In fact, I believe he took a small part in it."

"Why you—how dare you take him out of a sickbed? Have you taken leave of your senses?"

"I'm not sick, Aunt Isabella, really I'm not," Tommy put in. He added plaintively, "Can't you see I'm—not?" Tommy's voice quavered a little on the last word as if some of his newly found confidence was deserting him. He glanced at Phil, and suddenly his shoulders seemed to straighten. "Look, Aunt Isabella, I guess you thought I was sick. You and that fellow who—treated me. But you were wrong. I'm all right. You've got to realize I never have been sick."

"But you have—you are," his aunt insisted.

Tommy shook his head and smiled. "No. No. And let me tell you this—I don't intend to stay here another minute. I'm going home and pack and—"

"Tommy, you can't leave me. You can't."

But Tommy was not to be stopped. "I'm going home and pack and I'm going to enlist in the Navy. That's what I've been wanting to do all along, and that's what I'm doing today. Nobody can stop me." His voice was belligerent. "Nobody."

"Tommy, you *mustn't*." Mrs. Belfast turned a ravaged face to Phil. "He's all I've got in the world, Doctor. Can't you stop him? Can't you do something?"

Phil shook his head. He was smiling a little as he listened to Tommy's firm footsteps going down the corridor to the elevators.

Mrs. Belfast was regarding him with an expression of fury.

Phil said placatingly, "He'll be all right, Mrs. Belfast. There's no need to worry about him."

"I could have you discharged for this, young man. I'm not sure but what I shall."

Phil bowed ever so slightly.

As they listened to the woman's heavy steps moving toward the elevators, Phil threw out his hands in a nonchalant gesture. "Women!" he said, grinning. Then he sobered. "Are you about ready to go off duty, Linda?"

She shook her head. "Jane and I will be on duty until twelve."

Phil frowned. "What's Julian thinking about, letting you put in so much overtime? I think he's got ice water in his veins instead of good red blood. All he thinks about is this hospital."

They were walking toward the elevators now. Linda was going to the cafeteria for an early supper, then relieve Jane. Afterward they'd get the routine settled for the first part of the night.

Phil lowered his voice. "As cold-blooded as Julian is, I believe he's actually going overboard for Evelyn Delaney."

At Linda's look of surprise, he explained. "She's the one who's working up this great idea of looking after hospitalized children."

They stood at the elevator shaft for a moment and Phil went on, "The majority of these children are pampered and spoiled too much as it is. Even children of poor parents are brats these days."

"That isn't true, Phil." Linda's voice was indignant. She started to step into the elevator but he caught her arm.

"All right, Linda lovely, maybe not, if you say so. But when am I going to see you? Do you ever expect to have another evening off?"

"Maybe not soon. Not as long as Amy's sick, anyway."

"But when she's well?"

Linda started to shake her head, but Phil put in quickly, "Wait before you say no. I'll promise not to

make love to you. Love is mostly a psychopathic condition anyway. I'm not sure I even believe in it. Will you give me a date next time you're free?"

"I—yes, I guess so."

"It's a deal. Don't forget." Phil went on down the corridor, and Linda went to the cafeteria.

CHAPTER FOUR

Things were moving smoothly at Bennett Memorial again. Amy was able to sit up a little each day in the sunshine on the long south terrace and Julian had secured a relief nurse, middle-aged and efficient. Annie Scott had a round face and twinkly black eyes. But Annie was only temporary as she did not want a permanent place. More and more, Dr. Edson was leaving things for Julian. And as Dr. Paige was the most popular doctor on the staff, practically all his time was taken up during the day and usually half the night.

Sometimes Linda told him she thought he was working too hard, but he only laughed it off. "I like to be busy. Wouldn't want it any other way."

Then one late afternoon they met at the door of the small office and Julian looked deeply into Linda's face, imagining he saw a look of strain and tiredness.

"Things are easing up, as you know," he told her, "so tomorrow you take the whole day off. Get out in the air, have some fun. And no more night duty. Doctor's orders."

"You're sure you can manage?" Linda tried to keep her voice from sounding concerned. She thought if anyone needed a rest, it was Julian himself, but she knew it was useless to mention it again.

"Sure. Sure." Julian smiled. "We'll get along fine."

As she started down the main entrance steps, Phil walked up beside her, and they danced down the steps together, Phil holding her arm.

"Hear you're getting the day off tomorrow—" he began tentatively.

"Things do get around, don't they?"

"High time, if you ask me," Phil said. "How about our date? Remember? You promised."

Linda frowned a little. "Did I?"

"You're not going to stand me up, are you?"

"No, Phil. No, of course not."

"How about eight tonight, dinner and dancing?"

"That would be nice."

Phil took time to light a cigarette, the flame throwing his thin, narrow face in bold relief. There was something aristocratic about Phil's good looks and his manners. As if he'd been born to all the good things of life, fine schools, travel, a luxurious background. He was fastidious about his clothes and all his possessions. Linda had heard vaguely that he'd inherited a sizable fortune from his uncle, but had run through it. He evidently had an income apart from the money he received from the hospital, however, or he couldn't afford all the expensive clothes and the new car he bought every year.

Phil tossed away his cigarette and gave her a quick salute. "See you at eight," he said, and went back up the steps.

Linda went on to the cottage, where she found Karen in the kitchenette. Her housemate came out wearing a fluffy apron over her uniform. "You're not going back on duty, are you?" she asked anxiously.

Linda shook her head and slid into the big wing chair. "No. I'm going out and I—I wish I wasn't." She closed her eyes tiredly.

Karen sat down on the small love seat. "With Julian?" she asked.

"No. With Phil."

Karen frowned a little. After a moment, she said, "In some ways you can't help liking Phil and yet—

yet most of the time you have a feeling that he isn
really sincere. Though I admit that he does have
certain kind of charm, even when he's being cynical.

"I never take him seriously," Linda contributed
"He has a habit of saying pretty nothings to ever
girl he goes with. And they all know it doesn't mea
a thing."

"But people ought to be serious about love," Kare
said thoughtfully.

"Lots of people aren't, you know."

Karen nodded. "Yes, I know." She emphasized th
second word a little, went on, "Look, did you find ou
when Julian Paige was born?"

"No. What difference can that make?"

"It might make a big difference. If I knew h
birthday, I could tell you whether he's the righ
man for you."

"Honey, don't be ridiculous."

"I know you don't believe in astrology, Lind
but it's really uncanny how accurate it can be. You
find out if you'd study it."

The phone rang. Linda didn't move, so Karen a
swered it. "Oh, Peter, how are you?" she exclaime
Then, "No, no. I'm sorry . . . Yes, some other tim
—maybe." She replaced the receiver.

Linda opened her eyes. "It would do you good
get out, Karen. You've been on extra duty, to
haven't you?"

"Twice. Yes, I suppose it might do me good to
out, and I really like Peter. But you know how it
when I go with anyone else I keep thinking abo
how it was when Kerry and I—" She stopped a
abruptly switched the subject. "I was thinking abo
fixing some Italian spaghetti, so we wouldn't have
eat ham and prunes over at the beanery, but if you
not going to be here, I might as well go on over."

Linda nodded. Then she said, "The trouble with you, honey, is that you want to forget Kerry Lucas, but you won't give yourself a chance."

Karen stood up and took off her apron, her eyes thoughtful. "Maybe not," she admitted, then she shrugged. "Well, it's me for the prunes. See you later."

When she came back, Linda was sound asleep in the big chair. Karen shook her gently. "Hey, are you going out or not?"

Linda smothered a yawn with the back of her hand and sat up. "That was a wonderful nap. I could do with a lot more sleep."

She felt fine, however, after a shower. She came into the living room in a terry-cloth robe, her hair tousled from the shower cap. She shook her head vigorously and went back into the bedroom. "I think I'll wear my new suit," she called. "It's still cool in the evenings."

"Well, that suit's smart enough for any kind of a party," Karen called back.

The slimly boxed suit of shell-pink was really smart. Linda placed a little crystal-encrusted half-hat over her curls and came out to be inspected.

"You look simply spiffy," Karen announced after a critical appraisal.

Linda smiled and said, "So long." She'd heard Phil's new Chrysler stopping in front of the bungalow. He threw his cigarette away and came toward her as she walked down the steps. "Hello, Linda," he said, taking her arm. "Did I ever tell you I'm head over heels in love with you?"

"Perhaps a dozen times," Linda laughed, "and you never meant a word of it any one of the twelve times. And besides—"

"Besides, I promised not to make love to you," he

echoed. "Well, so I did." He helped her into the car. "But did it ever occur to you that I could be in dead earnest?"

"Never." Linda laughed again.

They were going to the Larkspur Club, and, as usual, Phil was driving too fast.

"Slow down," Linda cautioned. "I'd like to get a few long breaths of fresh air."

Phil complied with a derisive laugh. "Fraidy-cat."

The Larkspur Club was an expensive night spot several miles from town.

Linda didn't recognize anyone in the crowded club, but several well-dressed women spoke cordially to Phil and looked at his companion with curiosity.

Then a young man she knew casually came over and asked her for a dance. Vincent Drake had been a patient at Bennett once and Linda had cared for him. He was a good dancer—almost as good as a professional—and when the dance was over and he'd thanked her and left, Linda saw that Phil's face was dark.

"Is this Drake a special friend?" he demanded.

Linda gave him a startled look. "I knew him as a patient at Bennett," she said coolly. "This is the first time I've seen him since." Was Phil pretending to be jealous? And if so, for what reason? She glanced at his dark, intense face. There was just no understanding Phil Manley.

She was glad when the music started and they were again on the floor.

Afterward they went back to their table and finished the excellent food the waiters were continuing to serve between dances. After another dance Linda suggested that they leave.

"Are you bored?" Phil asked. "Maybe we'd better find your friend and have him join us."

"Phil, how can you be so ridiculous?"

He shrugged. "Well, I guess we might as well go. don't care too much for this orchestra."

"I think it's excellent."

He gave her a cynical smile. "*You* would. You love ife and are always pleased with it, with everything." He rose. "Come on, Linda lovely. I think there's go- ng to be a storm."

When they went out, the sky was dark with rolling lack clouds. A gust of wind came at them, nearly weeping them off their feet. Phil put his arm firmly round her and guided her to the car.

Their talk on the way back to town centered about he hospital—about Amy's getting well, and the ru- nor that Dr. Edson might soon retire. "He's old and ertainly crotchety enough," Phil said. "But at that e's still one of the best surgeons we've ever had here. t'll be hard to fill his place."

He was stopping in front of the cottage when there vas a low, ominous roll of thunder. He helped her ut and walked with her to the door. Then he eached for her hand and held it for a moment. Good night, Linda lovely."

"Good night, Phil. And thanks for a very nice eve- ing."

He nodded, got back in the car and she heard the runching of the car wheels over the drive and on to he street. Phil had an apartment uptown in a smart otel.

Just as Linda took off her coat and hat, there was a errifying clap of thunder; it seemed almost to shake he small building off its foundations.

Linda's thoughts went to Valerie. The child would e frightened. She was always terrified of lightning nd thunder, poor darling.

Linda hurriedly got into a light-blue plastic rain- oat, pulling the hood over her hair, and ran across he grounds to the hospital.

Even before she reached the third floor, she could hear the child's terrified cries. She was surprised to find Julian in Valerie's room, holding the sobbing child in his arms and trying to quiet her. "You mustn't be afraid, Valerie," he was saying. "Nothing can hurt you. I'm here with you."

His last words were drowned out by another clap of thunder and Valerie's screams grew louder then ever. She twisted and squirmed and tried to hide her face under Julian's arm.

He looked a little dazed when he saw Linda standing there in her blue raincoat, drops of rain still clinging to her hair.

"Here, I'll take her, Julian," Linda said quietly.

"I thought you were a ghost at first," he said as he relinquished Valerie.

"Now, darling, there's nothing to be afraid of. The thunder will stop in a minute and I'm going to sing you a little song. Then you'll go to sleep," Linda whispered.

"Will it stop, Miss Linda? Will it?" Valerie sobbed.

"Of course it will. And in just a few minutes. Lean against me and don't be afraid any more."

Linda heard Julian say something about giving the child a sedative, and she said she was sure Valerie would be all right soon.

Just then there was another loud clap of thunder and Valerie clutched her so hard around the neck that Linda could hardly breathe.

Then there was a sudden, blessed silence, and she could feel the little body relax in her arms. "Is it over?" Valerie whispered.

"I think so. But if it isn't, you're not going to be afraid any more, now are you?"

"I—don't know," the child quavered.

The storm really was over and Linda put Valerie

back in her bed. "Now I'm going to sit right here beside you and you're going back to sleep."

"I—I'm most awfully sleepy, I guess," Valerie said, and closed her eyes.

Linda waited to be sure she was sleeping soundly, then tiptoed from the room.

Julian was waiting out in the corridor. He took her arm. "I'll walk you across the grounds and get a smoke. Come on."

They walked briskly and Julian only had time for a few draws on his cigarette. "Know what I thought when I looked up and saw you standing there in that blue—whatever-you-call-it? I thought I was seeing an angel." He tossed away his cigarette, said, "Good night, Linda. You get some sleep," and walked away.

CHAPTER FIVE

Summer was really here. This was the way it always seemed to come—with a breath-taking suddenness. One day it was dark and cold and blustery, the next, summer roses were in bloom. It was a never-ending miracle.

Linda thought there would be ferns growing down by Ten Mile Creek. Maybe she and Karen could find time to go down and dig up some of them for their window boxes. Karen really enjoyed getting out in the woods, and there were so few things she was interested in. But it was hard to find the time.

The days seemed to fly by. The whole hospital staff was kept on its toes. Amy, who had come back to work too soon, had suffered a relapse. And once again Linda was trying to keep up her work and do floor duty at the same time. Both Phil and Julian told her she was doing a fine job. And once, even Dr. Edson complimented her when she was in surgery with him. This was really something.

When Karen and Linda would finally get to the cottage, they'd fall into bed, forgetting baths and hose and undies, and all the other routine things usually to be done before getting ready for sleep.

Last night before ten they'd had two emergencies. Teen-agers again.

In one of the emergencies, a young boy had had the fingers of his right hand almost severed. But Phil, who was operating, with Linda assisting, had done a wonderful job and the fingers would be usable again.

Phil walked beside her tonight when Linda went off duty—late, as usual—and she congratulated him on the successful operation.

"There's a great satisfaction in an accomplishment of this kind," Phil said thoughtfully. Then he broke off to add, "I've something to tell you, Linda. But it —it will wait."

It was midnight when they reached the cottage, and both Karen and Linda had been on duty since eight that morning. "Run on to bed, Linda lovely. You look tired. I'm glad Amy will be back tomorrow." Phil's voice sounded warm and kind.

"I hope she's really well this time," Linda told him. Then, "Good night, Phil. Pleasant dreams."

The next morning, when Karen and Linda went over to the cafeteria, Amy was sitting at the long table, eating her breakfast. Karen gave her a smile, and Linda went over and gave her a little hug. "You'd better be sure this time that you're really okay," she said tenderly.

"Just as good as new." Amy's quiet gray eyes smiled proudly at Linda. "I have good reports about you. Even from Doctor Edson."

"He's been very kind." Linda sat down next to Amy. "We managed, but it wasn't the same as if you'd been on the job."

"Well, I'll be right there today." Then Amy smiled. "I hear we've got another patient who has a crush on Doctor Paige."

"Madelon Steele. She seems to think Julian should be in attendance on her the whole day. And does he get annoyed when her nurse has to tell her he's busy!"

"Poor Julian. These women fussing over him embarrasses him a lot." Amy smiled again and added, "But it is amusing."

The three of them went up to the second floor to-

gether and plunged into the routine of the day. For a change, there were no emergencies, only a minor surgical case or so. There was time now and then for a breathing spell.

Linda was off-duty at her usual time and Phil was waiting for her. "Let's go out to Jimmy's Drive-In," he suggested. "I've got a little time."

Linda hesitated. "Phil, I don't believe—that is—"

"Don't tell me you don't get tired of that cafeteria food."

"Who doesn't?" Linda returned, then, "Give me ten minutes to freshen up?"

"Fifteen, but not a minute more. I've got to see Julian. Got a consultation coming up."

Linda took time for a quick shower before she got into a new summer print with a small bolero jacket. She was ready to go by the time Phil got back.

"Wish we had time to go uptown to a good place and maybe dance a little," Phil regretted.

"Jimmy's food is super, especially his pizza."

Phil didn't seem to be listening. "When I left," he began, "Julian was trying to explain to Evelyn why he couldn't see her tonight. But he seemed to be getting nowhere fast."

"Evelyn?"

"Oh, I thought you knew about her. One of those blondes. Her father owns Delaney's."

"The big department store?"

Phil nodded. "Pots of money, all that sort of thing. And I believe she's actually got Julian in a tizzy. He was really upset when Doctor Edson called for this consultation. But it's Julian's case. At least it will be if the board decides to let him take it. The child—Celia Branson—has a peculiar heart condition and won't live long unless she has an operation. But this operation has never been done before, and no sur-

geon wants to attempt it—that is, no one but Julian. You know how Julian is about kids."

"You think he will operate then?" If only Dr. Edson and the board didn't decide against it, she was thinking. It would of course be a very dangerous operation, but she knew Julian could do it.

After they'd had their sandwiches and were on the way back, Phil laughed cynically and said if anybody asked him, Evelyn Delaney wasn't so much interested in the recreation program for hospitalized, underprivileged children as she was in getting Julian interested in her personally.

"She's going after him in the right way," he finished.

"Maybe she—she really cares for him," Linda said unsteadily.

"Let's hope she does, for Julian's sake. When a girl like Evelyn makes up her mind she wants a certain man, I'm here to tell you that man doesn't have a chance. You may not believe it, but Julian's just as gullible as the next man. He'd better watch his step. He's just too trusting when it comes to women."

Linda didn't agree with him about Julian being too trusting. It was just that he was friendly and liked everybody, and sometimes people misunderstood this. But he wasn't the kind of man to be easily fooled by any woman. She'd never believe it.

Her thoughts were interrupted by Phil's stopping the car. He helped her out and stood there looking down at her. "I've known for a long time, Linda, that I'm an utter idiot to believe for one moment that you could ever care for me."

"But—but I do like you," Linda murmured unsteadily.

Phil ignored her words. He went on, "You don't know a thing about love, or about men, for that matter. You'll wake up, or grow up, one of these days.

Maybe I'll be around and maybe I won't." He stopped, went on with a slow emphasis, "But I don't think I will be." Then he said "Good night," stepped back into his car and drove away.

Linda stared after the disappearing car, then walked slowly toward the cottage, thinking over Phil's strange words, which had come out of a clear sky. She remembered he'd said he had something to tell her; maybe this was it. But the more she thought his words over, the less she understood them.

A week later, Julian stopped her as she was going to the elevators, and suggested that she take some time off; perhaps go somewhere in the country for a few days' rest. They could manage without her now that Annie was coming back for several weeks. And of course there was still Jane, he finished with a smile.

"But I'm just fine," Linda told him.

"I happen to know how much extra duty you've been putting in."

"I always catch up on my sleep," she smiled.

"That's a good habit," Julian said, but his face was still sober as he added, "Better think over my suggestion," and went on down the corridor to Amy's office.

After lunch, Linda went to see Valerie. One of the student nurses had brought the child a tray, but Valerie hadn't even looked at it.

"You *will* eat your good custard, won't you?" Linda coaxed.

"I'll try."

Linda sat down beside her. "I'll feed you. That'll make it taste better." She picked up the spoon.

"Where's Pennygig?" Valerie suddenly asked.

"Pennygig" was a big black and white panda that Julian had brought her several days before. When she'd asked him its name, he'd given her that ridicu-

lous one, and Valerie loved it. Now the panda was the favorite of all her toys.

Linda looked around, then exclaimed, "Here he is, partly under the bed. He must have fallen there while you were asleep."

Valerie held out her arms, but Linda said, "I'll have to dust him off. Right now we're going to eat this good custard."

Valerie obediently took the food from the spoon Linda held for her and succeeded in drinking most of her milk. Then Linda took the panda to the storage room and dusted it off with a brush.

"Here he is," she said when she brought it back. "Good as new."

"Thank you, Miss Linda." Valerie was hugging the panda close to her. "I wouldn't want to lose Pennygig."

As Linda left her, she was thinking that if it was warm enough after she got off-duty, she'd take Valerie out on the grounds.

And to her relief, Valerie agreed at once to go, if she could take Pennygig along.

"Why sure," she said. "He needs fresh air, too."

A few minutes later, they were walking about the grounds, Valerie holding Pennygig tight against her with one hand, her other hand in Linda's.

"We'll go and see the buttercups first," Linda told her.

Just then she looked up to see Julian's Buick slowing down on the drive. He stopped the car and came over to where they were standing.

"Valerie's aunt has at last been located," he said in a low voice. "She's been hospitalized in Bombay, suffering from shock and other complications. She was just recovering from a virus attack when she heard the news. But she'll soon be able to travel."

Linda's face had brightened. "Now Valerie won't be alone," she said joyfully. "I'm so glad, so glad."

Julian nodded and started to get back in the car, but he turned and came over to her again. "Would you care to spend the evening with me? We could have dinner somewhere uptown, and maybe dance a little. Would you like that?"

Would she like that? Linda said quietly, "It would be very nice." Then, feeling a little confused, "But maybe—I mean, perhaps there may be someone else—"

"You're not making sense, you know." Julian smiled.

Linda made a fresh start. "I was just—just trying to say that there might be someone else you'd rather be with."

Julian stared at her. "What put that into your little head? Well, get this—there isn't. Is it a date?"

She nodded, not meeting his eyes.

"See you at eight," he said.

A little while later, Linda had Valerie ready for bed. She knelt beside her when she said her prayers, then tucked her in and kissed her good night.

As she walked over to the cottage, Linda told herself she'd better simmer down. She was feeling excited and, yes, thrilled over her date with Julian. The first real date she'd ever had with him.

CHAPTER SIX

Linda and Julian went to a quaint little place on Highway Seven where the food was excellent and there was a small dance floor.

They talked shop, as doctors and nurses nearly always do. Julian was full of admiration for Phil Manley and his bold handling of Tommy's case. He added that he thought Phil had the makings of a brilliant psychiatrist.

Linda teased him a little about Madelon, the young divorcée who demanded Julian's attentions practically every waking moment.

Julian laughed and shrugged. "Ridiculous!" he said, and added, after a minute, "If Madelon King had four or five children, she'd have something to occupy that empty mind of hers."

"Now, that's unkind," Linda chided.

"Lots of women with money try to fill their lives with bridge and canasta and cocktail parties; then they're always running to analysts or hypnotists to find out why they're nervous. A little responsibility would work wonders with them."

The evening was all too short. In just no time at all, it seemed to Linda, they were stopping in front of the cottage.

"Thank you, Linda, for a very happy evening," Julian said, and he sounded as though he meant it.

Linda said, "I enjoyed it too, Julian."

Then his car went crunching down the white chat drive—and the evening was over.

Linda had thought for a moment that Julian was reluctant to say good night, but that was probably her imagination working overtime. She knew he was going to put in some extra hours studying the case history of the little girl with the serious heart condition.

During the next week or so, Linda hardly saw Julian at all. Most of the time she was working with Dr. Edson and the other two doctors down on the main floor.

Dr. Edson was more crotchety than ever and Linda hadn't been having too easy a time working with him. Once he'd almost staged a tantrum right in the surgery when he'd come near dropping an instrument.

But the next operation where she assisted him went off smoothly. It was an emergency appendectomy and when the patient had been wheeled out of the operating room and Linda was busy cleaning the instruments, Dr. Edson thanked her for her efficient assistance. All his past unpleasantness was forgotten in the warm glow of satisfaction that swept over her.

The following Friday, Linda answered the phone in the small office. A nice feminine voice asked for Dr. Manley. Linda went to find Phil and found Julian, instead. He told her that Phil was in Dr. Edson's office and suggested that she get the number. They walked to the office together, and Linda took down the number and turned to leave.

Julian stopped her. "I've been wondering if we could manage dinner tonight? How about eight-thirty?"

Linda started to answer, but was interrupted by the phone ringing again. This time it was for Julian.

She waited outside the door, but she couldn't help overhearing what Julian was saying. "Sure. I'm delighted that you're back. Missed you a lot. No. No.

dot tonight," he said after a pause, then, "Yes, we o have things to talk over. We'll get to it early next eek for sure."

There had undoubtedly been a note of disappointaent in Julian's voice when he told his caller—Linda as sure it was Evelyn Delaney—that he couldn't see er tonight. When he came out to Linda and said, Well, how about our date?" she was doing some uick thinking.

"Julian," she said, "I'm sorry, but I—I'm afraid can't make it tonight."

He gave her an appraising look. "Do you have a ate?"

"No, that is, not—not—" She was stammering and ae hated it.

Julian's brows were drawn down in a frown. Make up your mind," he said crisply.

"I can't make it tonight."

Julian was looking at her, his eyes narrowed. Okay. Some other time," he said, and went on down ae corridor.

A few minutes later, Phil came in and Linda gave im the number. "Nothing important," he said indifferently.

Linda started to leave but Phil caught up with her. Hey, wait a minute," he said. "What's all the hurry? ren't you off tonight? Let's go dancing."

Linda stared at him confusedly. "But I thought—idn't you say—?"

"Forget what I said." Phil's voice was almost ough. Then he added, with a quick laugh, " 'The ear's at the Spring,' we're young and somewhere ere's music and laughter. Let's get our share, shall e?"

Linda gave in, smiling. "All right, Phil. But I want get home by midnight."

"Such enthusiasm I've never heard. And who are

you anyway—Cinderella?" He drew a quick breath "Linda, are you afraid of me?" he asked as they started toward the entrance doors. "I'm really quite harmless."

He was teasing again, but Linda spoke seriously. "I guess I just don't understand you very well Phil."

"We'll take steps to do something about that," Phil said, his voice capturing a sudden note of gaiety

Linda went on into the cottage and Phil back to the hospital, saying he'd see her at eight.

Karen wasn't in, though two or three astrology magazines were lying in the big chair. She must be somewhere out on the grounds.

Linda removed the magazines, sat down, and closed her eyes. She was wishing she hadn't accepted Phil's invitation, and that she could have accepted Julian's.

"My trouble is," Linda told herself firmly, "I'm too sensitive where Julian is concerned. Because I like him so much, I let myself think about him to the exclusion of other men. And that's not good. It's even ridiculous. Just because he's kind and tries to be fair to everybody—that's no reason why I should hold him in my thoughts so much. And I won't do it any more. I won't. I won't."

Linda took time for a half-hour's nap.

Just before she was ready, a small box came from the florist containing a corsage of yellow rosebuds Phil had always said that her best color was yellow and she had bought the dress in gold taffeta with a softly pleated wide skirt because the color seemed very becoming.

She was pinning the corsage on her shoulder when Phil appeared at the living-room door. He stood there looking at her, his eyes crinkling. "It isn't fair," he said.

"Fair?" Linda whirled around in bewilderment.

"For you to look so delectable, so alluring and seuctive and so—so very far away."

She came back at him easily, "You use so many ig words, how do you expect me to follow you? Reiember I'm just a little country girl."

"Says you!" Phil took her arm. "Come on, Delilah."

"I wish I knew when to take you seriously, if you ver *are* serious," she said when they were in the car.

"I'm really most serious when I'm teasing and least erious when I'm not."

"This is becoming more and more involved."

"All right." Phil speeded up. When she asked him o slow down, he only said, "I'm hungry."

They went to a new place on the outskirts of town —the Flamingo. Its walls were painted with Spanish cenes of the old cavalier period, Spanish dancers and oreadors, the color scheme the most exotic Linda had ver seen. And the food was really superb.

The moment they entered the place, Phil's manner changed. No longer teasing and bantering, but ilking with ease, he was at his scintillating best. 'hen, as it would happen, when she and Phil were ancing again, a voice asked, "May I?" and Julian, ot waiting for permission, cut in. He wasn't smiling, ther. In fact, he looked a trifle grim. "Hello, inda," he said. "We've made practically half a ozen night spots and then at the last one, here *you* re. Am I surprised?"

Linda didn't answer and Julian went on, his eyes nsmiling. "I just want to ask you one question, inda. Then I shan't intrude any further."

"You're not—" Linda began, but he interrupted er.

"I'm sure Phil thinks I am intruding—and who an blame him? But I want to know if you wouldn't

come with me tonight because you were waiting fo Phil to ask you."

Linda could hardly bear to look at him. She ha never seen Julian so close to anger before. And why Why? She kept asking herself. Suddenly she hear herself speaking, a little too urgently. "No. No. H didn't have a thing to do with it."

Julian didn't seem convinced. He continued t look at her as if waiting for a further explanation.

At last Linda began quietly, hoping she could kee her voice steady, "It was like this, Julian. I though you—you wanted to be with Miss Delaney, now tha she's back."

"You thought—what?" The words almost seeme to explode from his lips.

"I overheard you talking to her and—I got the ide that you wanted to be with her."

"You were dead wrong." Julian's voice was pos tive, but it was still cool. He probably didn't believ her, Linda thought. They had stopped dancing. "I take you back to Phil," he said.

As they walked toward Phil, who was standing i the double doorway smoking a cigarette, Julia slowed his steps. "The truth is, I wanted to talk som thing over with you, Linda. I've been waiting for it t develop a little more, but now I think it's past th planning stage and we're ready to put it into action.

Phil moved toward them, then, and Julian lifte his hand in a salute and said to Linda, "I'll see yo before long. Good night."

Phil and Linda danced again. They enjoyed th floor show, which consisted of a group of real artis who danced with castanets to the most spirite music Linda had ever heard.

At twelve, they were on their way back. After time, Phil said, "Any girl who lets herself fall for Ju

an Paige will let herself in for an awful lot of heart-
ches."

"I don't see how you can say that," Linda pro-
ested. "Julian is one of the fairest, kindest men I've
ver known. And he certainly thinks a lot of you, Phil
—he said some very complimentary things about your
andling of Tommy's case."

"All Julian ever thinks about is his work. He's got
terrible obsession about it." Phil stopped, then went
n, "But I'm glad he understood Tommy's case. I
ad a heck of a time making anybody else see it.
here was just the bare possibility that something
ould be wrong with the boy. He was dreadfully con-
used. Then when I found out that his aunt had been
eeing Gilford—he's one of those popular hypnotists
ho really has some standing in society—well, I fig-
red between this man and Tommy's aunt, they were
ying to hypnotize him into thinking he was ill." He
ook time to light a cigarette. "Well, I just happened
o have the angle. His aunt was afraid Tommy would
e called to the service, and she wanted to keep him
ith her, tied more or less to her apronstrings."

"It took courage to do what you did."

"Thanks," Phil said drily. "People seem to be tak-
ng more and more to hypnotism these days. They're
ven having their teeth pulled by hypnotism, instead
f injections. Some of it's good, but you can't always
ell."

They were at home now, and quite suddenly Phil's
nood changed. He helped her from the car, looked
t her for a moment and said, "I won't be seeing you
gain, Linda. This is good night and goodbye."

CHAPTER SEVEN

Linda didn't let herself worry about Phil' parting words. She had never understood the unpre dictable and erratic doctor, and probably neve would.

She knew as long as she lived she would remembe the dance she and Julian had had together. The wa he held her loosely, yet firmly, the way their step matched—there had been magic in it.

There was news when Linda and Karen reache the hospital next morning. A message had come fro Valerie's aunt that she would come for the child a eleven that morning. The Crandall family were wel known in the town and Mrs. Louise Crandall, Val rie's aunt, was a widow without children. She ha valuable holdings in the town and a veritable palac of a home out on the other side of the Country Clu

Mrs. Crandall had been traveling with friends in remote part of India when the tragedy had occurre She'd read about it after returning to Bombay in a American-language newspaper giving an account the death of Valerie's parents. Already weakene by a virus attack in Bombay, she'd gone into shoc and had been hospitalized a long time.

Linda explained all this to Valerie, who looked her with wide, troubled eyes. She didn't seem to r member her aunt at all and the old fear of leavi her friends and the safety of the hospital shone i her face.

It was different, however, when Mrs. Cranda

ame in followed by a uniformed chauffeur, who icked up the two bags and went on down to the car.

Mrs. Crandall moved to the chair where Valerie sat little stiffly. The child stared at her for a moment n disbelief. "You—you're my Aunt Lou," she said onderingly.

"Yes, darling." The woman bent over, kissed alerie, and held her face against her for a long moent, as if trying to fight back the tears. Then she ooked at her and smiled. "I've come to take you ome with me, Valerie. You're going to be my little irl now."

Valerie listened gravely. "Can Miss Linda come oo?"

"Of course," Mrs. Crandall agreed.

Linda said quickly, "I'll come to see you, dear," nen she added, "Here's Doctor Paige to say goodbye."

Valerie looked up at Julian, a faint color coming o her cheeks. "Will you and Miss Linda come and ve with me and my Aunt Lou?"

"Well, honey, I expect we'd better stay here and ook after our sick people. But we'll be seeing you ften."

"You promise?" she asked anxiously.

"You bet we will."

They were moving toward the elevators now, inda walking beside the little girl. Suddenly Valerie ave a cry. "Pennygig—where is he?"

"I'll get him, Valerie." Linda turned quickly back o the room and recovered the panda.

Valerie held out her arms for it. "Thank you, Miss inda. Pennygig would be awful lonesome if I didn't ke him with me,wouldn't he?"

"Yes, I'm sure he would be," Linda said. Then she ent over and kissed the little girl, said goodbye to ne slender, pretty woman who was Valerie's aunt nd hurried back to her patients.

The phone rang in the small office and Linda hu ried to answer it. Someone leaving a call for Phi When she turned from the phone, she saw Julia standing in the door. "Valerie will be all righ now," he said with a smile. Then, "If I asked you t go out to Jimmy's tonight, would you suddenly fin you had another date at the last minute?"

"You know I wouldn't."

"Linda, I would like to see you, but I'll only hav about an hour. Could you go to Jimmy's with me, sa about seven?"

"I'd like to very much."

"You're sure?"

"I'm very sure."

"I'll be at the cottage by seven, maybe a few mi utes earlier." He went on down to Amy's desk the and Linda went in to see an elderly patient who w suffering with arthritis. The gold treatment hadn seemed to help very much, but Phil still believed i it. This woman was one of his patients, and when h gave Linda instructions about the treatment, h seemed to look through the young nurse, hardly se ing her at all.

Julian was in front of the cottage promptly seven. They drove at once to Jimmy's, and, as usua Jimmy came out to take their orders. "Doc Paige" w one of his favorite people in the world.

It was steak sandwiches again—and very excelle steaks they were, too, placed between huge slices bread. Julian had coffee first, and again with th sandwiches and the crisp vegetable salad served wi them.

Both Linda and Dr. Paige concentrated on the food, a habit nurses and doctors nearly always hav since they never quite know when they will be able finish a meal.

Now, as they finished their sandwiches, Julian ighted a cigarette and began talking.

"You've always been a girl with ideas, Linda, so I know you're going to be interested in this new movement which seems to be sweeping the whole country. It's something that's been needed a long time." Julian took several more draws on his cigarette, extinguished it and tossed it away. "I remember you said once you thought an orphan home should always be built close to the homes for elderly ladies, so that the children and these women could get together and be a comfort to each other. I thought you really had something there."

"Lots of elderly women are very lonely and the children would quickly find their way into their hearts," Linda observed, still not understanding just what Julian was leading up to.

"This new movement is known as a Recreation Service for hospitalized children, mostly charity hospitals, I believe, and doctors all over the country are much in favor of it. Evelyn Delaney is organizing a lot of young girls here as volunteers, while she acts both as director and worker." Julian paused to draw a deep breath.

"It sounds like a wonderful idea."

He smiled. "I knew you'd think that. Now I'd like you to go out to the Children's Hospital as soon as you can and study the situation—see what ideas you can contribute. Evelyn, I'm sure, would be happy to have constructive help. Most of these girls are without any experience at all."

"I'll be happy to go," Linda agreed enthusiastically.

"You see," Julian went on, "doctors have often noticed the effect of loneliness in young children, known under the more technical name as emotional

starvation and deprivation of maternal care. Most of these volunteers are girls who've had nothing on their minds but to have themselves a royal good time. But you'd be surprised to see how interested they are. Of course it's a large order," he added.

"I'm just sure it'll work."

Julian smiled at her enthusiasm and looked fleetingly at his watch. "Well, back to the salt mines," he said cheerfully.

But he drove slowly and went on talking. "There's still a lot of organizational work to be done, and this is where you can really help. Some of these girls are reading up on child psychology, but it can't be learned in a week or so." His voice slowed and then in a moment he was talking again. "The point is they're really trying. And if you could find time to go out there now and then and give them a few pointers, it would be much appreciated—by me as well as Evelyn."

Linda promised, but not without a little misgiving. She didn't believe Evelyn Delaney and her friends would take very kindly to any help from a nurse. But still, you couldn't tell. And she hoped with all her heart that the project would be a success.

"You'll go, Linda?" Julian questioned as he stopped in front of the cottage.

She gave him her promise again.

"That'll be wonderful," Julian said, but he still sat there as if thinking.

Linda knew he had to get back to the hospital, so she stepped from the car. "Don't bother to get out," she said. "Good night, and thanks for the good food."

"See you in the morning," Julian said, and waved his hand.

Karen, in pajamas and with cold cream on her face, was sitting in the big chair, the usual astrology mag

zine in her lap. "Hi!" she said. "You went to dinner with Julian, didn't you?"

"How did you know?"

Linda, who had already started undressing in the bedroom, heard Karen say, "Oh, that's easy. The look on your face and the hospital grapevine. At Bennett, the nurses find out things before they happen."

"Oh, I wouldn't go as far as that."

She walked back into the living room in pajamas, her hairbrush in her hand.

Karen looked up from her magazine with a frown. "When are you going to find out?" she demanded.

"Find out what?" Linda sat down on the couch and began brushing her hair.

"Julian's birthday. You'll have to know."

The brush was arrested in mid-air as Linda studied Karen's face. "Why do you consider Julian's birthday so important?"

"How can I tell if he's the right man for you to marry, if I don't know when he's born. It's important to marry a man born under the right sign. I've been telling you that all along."

"Karen, let's don't worry about Julian. I don't believe he'll ever want to get married, even—even if he should fall in love. He has some queer idea that doctors shouldn't marry because they can't give their wives a normal sort of home life."

Karen let the magazine fall to her lap. "Men have talked that way before. It's silly to pay any attention to them. There's gossip about Julian and this Delaney girl."

Linda nodded. "I've heard it."

Karen went back to her reading. Linda finished brushing her hair, tied it back with a ribbon, and decided to give herself a manicure.

"What did Julian want to tell you?" Karen asked after a few minutes had passed.

Linda told her about the recreation program fo underprivileged children in the orphanages and i the hospitals.

Karen had heard something about it, she said. Sh added, "I guess I'm being cynical, but I'm wondering if it could be just a publicity stunt. Girls like Evelyn Delaney like to be in the public eye."

"You really are being cynical, Karen. You love children as much as I do and you ought to be glad these poor innocents are going to get some attention instead of being neglected week after week."

"I'll be glad if it is on the up and up. But if it gets started and falls through, it'll be much worse for those poor little children than before." Karen looked thoughtful. "I'm sure if Evelyn Delaney hadn't worked up this idea, Julian Paige wouldn't have given her a single thought."

"I think she's sincere," Linda declared.

"I can only hope you're right, honey." Karen sat up, a frown on her face. "Amy put me back on the Steele case," she said plaintively.

"I heard her name was Madelon King."

"She's got two or three names, but she wants to be called by her second to last husband's name. His name was King."

"Sounds mixed up."

Karen nodded. "She says she's an insidious woman and she always gets the man she wants."

"Get the dictionary," Linda said, laughing.

"She wants Julian Paige."

"So I've heard."

"How does a woman get that way? She's enormously wealthy and maybe she thinks any man would be interested in her for that reason."

"Julian wouldn't."

"Honey, he just might. You can't ever tell about a man. He's human, and this woman—you couldn'

all her pretty or anything but she has a certain appeal. The way she smiles is seduction itself." Karen stretched her arms over her head and gave a luxurious yawn. "We'd better get to bed, Linda." She looked teasingly at the other nurse. "And don't make me remind you again. Find out Julian's birthday."

"Okay. I'll try to remember to ask him," Linda promised.

After they were in bed and the lights were out, Linda thought happily that quite a lot of time had gone by since Karen had had one of her dark moods. She was glad Karen had become interested in something—even astrology. It was helping her to forget.

CHAPTER EIGHT

"We'd better wear our uniforms," Karen suggested, "but certainly we won't need our capes. We might find a little work to do or something."

Linda had slipped off her Oxfords and was wriggling her toes luxuriously. "We're supposed to play with them, give them the little attentions they miss from their mothers. So many mothers have to work, you know."

"It will be fun," Karen said warmly.

They were on their way by a little after one.

The Children's Hospital, about three miles from the city proper, was a long, rambling building much in need of paint. The extensive grounds had been neglected, though there were a few swings and a see-saw on one side of the frame building.

Both girls decided it was a rather dreary place as they went through the entrance doors, which, like the building itself, could have stood a coat of paint.

They were directed to the stairway by an orderly and climbed two flights to the third floor, where they found themselves in an enormous room, very sunny because of its many wide windows.

There were at least thirty children in the room and a great number of small beds, many of them occupied.

As Linda and Karen walked down the center of the big room between the beds, Karen whispered, "There's Evelyn Delaney. I recognized her at once from seeing her picture in the newspapers."

Linda turned her head discreetly. She saw a tall girl, slender almost to gauntness, with red hair combed straight back from her forehead and done in a bun on the back of her head. She had greenish eyes that slanted ever so slightly at the corners. Evelyn Delaney might not be beautiful, Linda thought, but she was definitely striking. She didn't think it would be hard for any man to fall in love with her.

Evelyn was playing with a blond little boy of about two. The child gave squeals of delight as he tried to catch the small balls which Evelyn held dangling from her fingers close to the baby's hands. They were brightly colored plastic balls and the child was entranced with them. Sometimes Evelyn would let him catch them, then she would gently take them away and the game would start all over again.

Linda said in a low voice, "I wonder if we should speak to her. I think Julian would want me to."

"All right, let's," Karen agreed indifferently.

They walked over to the bed where Evelyn stood, and Linda said, "I'm Linda Stephens, Miss Delaney, and this is my friend, Karen Winslow."

"How do you do?" Evelyn said graciously, in her clipped, finishing-school voice. "You're from Bennett, aren't you?"

Linda nodded. "We had a little time off and wondered if we could help here in any way."

Evelyn looked around the big room. There were at least twenty other girls, most of them pretty and beautifully dressed, playing with the children, some of whom were running about the floor. Now and then, there were squeals of excitement as a child was handed a new toy. Evelyn smiled and looked back at Linda. "The girls seem to be getting along fine with the children, and I don't believe there's anything special to do at the moment. But we do appreciate your coming."

Linda and Karen turned to leave and Evelyn added quickly, as if determined to be friendly, "Suppose you two just walk around and see how you think we're getting on with the project. Of course you understand that we're just getting started."

"We'll do that. Thank you," Linda said politely.

The two girls moved on down the aisle between the rows of beds.

"Did we get a brush-off, or didn't we?" Karen asked in a low voice.

"No—I don't think so." Evelyn's voice had sounded a little curt, Linda admitted to herself, but she thought this was probably just her way of talking.

"I know about girls like her." Karen was unconvinced. "And did you see how she sized *you* up?"

Just then, Karen spied a little boy standing up in bed, holding onto the railing, big tears in his eyes. He wasn't a pretty child: his face was swollen and little tufts of red hair stood up straight on his head. No one was paying any attention to him, and he felt neglected.

The two girls started toward his bed and Karen was the first to reach it.

"Somebody been 'busin' you, honey?" she asked gently. "Leaving you all by your little self. They ought to be ashamed. Look, Linda, he hasn't a single toy."

"I saw a whole box of them over in a corner. You stay with him and I'll see if it's all right for him to have some of them."

Karen nodded, and lifted the child up in her arms. He laid his head on her shoulder with a contented sigh. She took him to a window and let him look out. This was something he liked. He started prattling with happiness, putting his fingers against the glass panes, and now and then turning to pat Karen's face

The nurse down at the far end of the room, a big woman with a round, honest face, stared at Linda in a curious sort of way when she came up and asked about the toys. Then she said, "Sure, help yourself. They're all for the children."

The nurse was sitting by the bed of a little girl who was sobbing as if her heart were broken.

Linda asked what the trouble was.

"She's been crying like this for hours. Nobody can stop her. And she has a fever. I do wish something could be done." The nurse still continued to stare at Linda.

Linda said, "I'll be back and maybe I can help." She walked over to the box of toys, selected a rubber ball, painted red and blue, and took it over to Karen. Then she came back. "May I lift her up?"

"She won't let anyone touch her. She only cries harder when we start to take her up."

At that moment the little girl turned over. When she saw Linda, she gave a cry of joy and held out her arms. Linda lifted her from the bed.

There was a small rocker by the window and Linda sat down with the baby in her arms, rocking gently, and crooning to her.

The child was asleep when Karen came. She looked at the baby and smiled. "She isn't crying now, is she?"

"I never saw anything like it in my whole life," the nurse said. "This girl is the spitting image of Betsy's mother. The very spitting image. Are you her aunt or something?" she asked Linda.

"No. I—I'm not any relation."

The nurse sighed. "Poor little baby. I don't know what will become of her now."

"Hasn't she any relatives at all?" Karen questioned.

"I don't think so. At least none has been found yet. Her mother brought her here for a check-up yes-

terday and on the way home she was struck by a hit and-run driver. Her father died in a TB sanitarium last year."

Linda's eyes were misty as she looked down at the child.

"She'll have to be sent to an orphanage, I suppose," the nurse said unhappily.

Karen went back to another part of the room where a little boy was sitting in a high chair holding a small plastic horn in his hands. He didn't seem to know what to do with it. Karen smiled at him, took the horn and blew a note on it. The child clapped his hands and reached for the horn. Before she gave it to him, Karen took out a piece of tissue from her bag and carefully wiped it. The boy put it to his lips and the horn gave a funny little toot. He wriggled all over with ecstatic joy.

"You learn fast, don't you, darling?" Karen smiled.

It took so little to make a child happy, she was thinking, and they were all so responsive and eager. She knew now this was a wonderful job these girls were doing. She looked around and saw that most of them had left and the others were getting ready to go.

The cocktail hour, Karen suddenly remembered. She went over and took a peep at the little red-headed boy. He still held the big ball clutched in his hands and he was fast asleep.

Karen realized it was getting late. She and Linda had to get supper in the cafeteria and Linda was going to relieve Amy for an hour or two. Amy still needed time to rest, especially when she was on night duty.

"Time to go, Linda," Karen said reluctantly.

"I know," Linda answered, her eyes troubled. "But every time I start to put Betsy down, she almost goes into hysterics. I can't bear it. She's so unhappy and

he seems frightened. I can't bear to leave her when he wants me so."

"She thinks you're her mother, honey," the nurse aid gently. "You look enough like her mother to be ıer twin sister. Same hair with a bit of dark gold in t, same kind of soft brown eyes. You're exactly her ize, too."

"And so she thinks—believes—" Linda couldn't go on. After a minute, she said, "I'd give anything if were here mother."

"So would I." The nurse rose. "I'll just have to ake her. The trouble is, I know she'll start crying ıgain." She looked at Linda. "It's simply uncanny, he way you resemble this child's mother. I don't ınderstand it." Then she reached for Betsy. "Come on, dear. Hilda will rock you, too."

Betsy burrowed her head in Linda's neck, clutching her with tiny, feverish hands.

In the end, the nurse had to pry the small hands loose from Linda as the child broke into a wild paroxysm of sobs.

Linda and Karen just stood there, not knowing what to do. The nurse motioned them to go on.

The last sound the two girls heard as they went down the stairs was the pitiful sobs of the child.

CHAPTER NINE

It was unbelievable that the summer was more than half over. Now and then a little moist wind blew in from the river and there was an intangible whisper of autumn in the clear, cool air.

It had been a very busy summer. There had been a mild polio epidemic; then the usual summer emergencies—swimming accidents, several cases of food poisoning, and of course automobile crashes.

Linda and Julian were in surgery this morning. A little boy living out near Raleigh Springs had shot himself with an "unloaded" pistol.

The floor nurse had more trouble with the boy's mother than with the patient, for the child had come through the operation splendidly, even though it was a delicate one, the wound being close to the heart.

Julian looked tense and tired when he went to scrub up. Linda sterilized the instruments, made the rounds after scrubbing, talked to Amy a few moments about one of the patients who was not responding to the treatments, and then went to see the patient on whom Julian had operated. The boy was beginning to recover consciousness from the heavy anesthetic, his mother sitting anxiously beside his bed, listening to every breath he drew.

At eleven, she was again in surgery, this time with Dr. Edson. This was a thoracotomy, a chest operation to allow room for an enlarged heart.

At last the long, busy day was over. Julian took ime for a cigarette in the small office and Linda hecked supplies for Amy in the storeroom. She ound a few things in short supply and went in to hone for them.

Julian was still in the office. When she'd finished utting in her order, he came and stood before her. I thought you would have gone out to the children's ospital before now," he said, giving her an apprais- ng look.

"We went out on the first P.M. Karen and I had fter you told me about it. We both think it's a won- erful thing for the children."

Julian's blue eyes brightened. "I knew you would. Did you see Evelyn, talk to her?"

"For a minute. She was rather busy."

Julian smiled. "She usually is. It's quite a job, you now."

Linda nodded. She was ready to leave now, but she esitated a moment before she said, "Good night, Doctor."

Julian, who was seated at the desk looking over ome X-rays, answered absently, "Good night, Linda," and didn't look up.

Linda went down to the cafeteria, expecting to nd Karen there, but she was nowhere to be seen. Later, she found her in the cottage, and at the first lance she knew Karen had been crying again. "Didn't ou want any supper, Karen?" she asked.

"No." Karen glanced up from an astrology maga- zine. "But don't worry about me, Linda. I'm all ight." She added after a minute, "Only of course I now I'm seventy different kinds of an idiot. It's just –just that when you think you've got your dreams all icely tucked away, they sneak up on you again."

"It takes time, honey," Linda said gently.

Karen got up and walked over to the window. "My

anniversary," she said bitterly. "Two years ago today the man I loved married another girl."

Linda, who had been trying to figure out some way to get Karen out of her dark mood, suddenly had an idea. "Suppose we go uptown," she suggested. "This is the night all the stores are open. I want to buy a doll for Betsy."

For a moment she thought Karen would refuse. Then she said surprisingly, "Okay. We'll get a real nice doll for her and I'll knit it a sweater and bootees."

While they waited in front of the hospital for a bus, they saw Phil go by in a two-toned Cadillac, a blonde girl at the wheel. He was hatless and his dark hair was blowing in the wind. The girl was driving so fast, they didn't see Linda and Karen.

The bus came. After they'd climbed on, Karen asked, "You haven't been seeing Phil, have you?"

"Only during routine hours." Linda added after a moment with a laugh, "Guess I've been given the old heave-ho. But don't think I'm bothered. Sometimes I like Phil and sometimes I don't. He seems to be all mixed-up inside."

Karen nodded. "I'd say he's mixed-up all right."

They alighted from the bus at Main and Madison and went into a drugstore. When they were seated in a booth, Linda said, "You'd better have a sandwich, Karen. Then I'll treat us to a soda."

"Okay, Doctor," Karen said listlessly.

They found the very doll for Betsy. It was made of the new kind of rubber that looks like real flesh and was dressed in a pretty white frock with a cap and little white shoes on its fat pink feet.

Karen bought the material for knitting the sweater and bootees after they left the drugstore. Then they window-shopped for an hour and went back to the hospital.

The moment they got back to the cottage, Karen arted knitting. "I can't wait to see that child again," ıe said, sitting quietly in the big chair. "And that recious little redhead. I hope someone is playing ith him. He's a very smart little guy."

"I hope we get a chance to go out there again soon," inda said, beginning to give herself a manicure.

The opportunity came the very next evening. As inda was leaving in the late afternoon, Julian caught p with her on the front entrance steps and asked if ıe'd like to go out to the Children's Hospital with im.

"Indeed, I would," Linda answered, an eager light ɔming into her dark eyes. "Karen wants to go, too," ıe added.

"Bring her along. The more the merrier."

But Karen wasn't to be found anywhere. Finally inda went next door to Jane's cottage, but Jane adn't seen her either.

By the time Linda had slipped into her brown suit nd crisp white blouse, Karen still hadn't come in. here wasn't anything to do but go on. Julian ɔuldn't be kept waiting.

It took a long time to get out to the Children's lospital on the bus, but in Julian's car, it didn't seem ıy time at all.

Julian looked quizzically at the box Linda held so ırefully in her lap and she explained that it was a oll for Betsy, and went on to tell him about her ıother's tragic death and the child's illness. "I know ıildren often have high fever," she continued, "but etsy doesn't want her food and she doesn't even eep. She just cries and cries for her mother. It's eartbreaking. I—I wish you could take care of er."

Julian looked thoughtful. "Things are rather in-

formal out here, but I'd have to find out who her doc tor is, of course."

They drove through the ill-kept grounds and Jul ian commented on how it seemed as if state institu tions were always in need of money. He said they hac a fine, loyal staff out here and should have bette working equipment.

Most of the children were sleeping when Linda and Julian entered the many-windowed third-floor room Julian went off to have a consultation with anothe doctor about one of the little patients, and Linda went straight to Betsy's bed.

A tall, rather gaunt-looking nurse was in charg today. She eyed Linda suspiciously as she moved up beside Betsy's bed.

The child hadn't been asleep and there were tear stains around her eyes. When she saw Linda, she tried to sit up.

Linda bent over her, but the nurse said sharply "Don't take her up."

"But she—I mean—" Linda stammered unhappily The little girl had fallen back on her bed and wa looking at Linda with puzzled eyes. "This is the firs time she's been quiet in hours and hours," the nurs explained. "She's had a sedative and I sure hope sh goes to sleep. Her constant whimpering is getting o my nerves."

As the nurse spoke, Linda saw Betsy's eyelids dro over her eyes. She stood there watching the little tea stained face and the soft brown curls falling over he forehead.

Linda was remembering what Hilda had said, tha Betsy thought Linda was her mother. She though Oh, if I could only take her home with me.

She asked the nurse if the child's relatives ha been found, and she shook her head with a shru "No. She's just a foundling."

The word brought a chill to Linda's heart.

She was sitting near Betsy's bed when at last Julian came to find her. He'd been gone over an hour and apologized for being late.

He looked down at the sleeping child. "She needs a lot of understanding care," he said slowly. "I hope she will get it here. But I can do nothing. Guy Abbott is her doctor. We've never worked together and I'm sure he'd resent anything I might want to do. But he's a good doctor, Linda."

"I'm glad he is, but I still wish you could be on the case. Professional ethics sometimes make me angry."

"I'm afraid they're a necessary evil," Julian said, smiling wryly.

As they were going out the front door, Evelyn met them with some of her friends. She seemed very friendly and asked if Linda and Julian would go to the country club with them.

Linda started to speak, but Julian interrupted her. "Thank you, Evelyn, but not today. We're very busy people."

When they were seated in Julian's Buick, Linda said, "I could have gotten a cab."

"I have no time for country clubs." Julian lit a cigarette and she could see that his face looked a little grim. "Not many people in this big, generous, fine land of ours realize how many children get a rough deal. So much needs to be done. So much." He paused, then went on, "If I don't get that children's ward at Bennett's, I think I'll apply to a pediatric hospital."

"Julian, you wouldn't leave Bennett's. How on earth would we ever get along without you?" Linda sounded genuinely alarmed.

Julian gave an unexpected laugh. "How would I ever get along without *you*, my good right hand? No,

honey, I'll stick—and I'll get that ward yet. In fact, I may hold out for an entire new building."

"I hope you do." Linda's voice was warm and eager.

"Don't forget you're in on the deal," Julian reminded her, and gave her hand a little pat.

CHAPTER TEN

A flood of brilliant sunshine greeted Linda nd Karen as they came out of the cottage to go to reakfast. A cool wind was blowing and the air was ike honey. And best of all, Karen and Linda were oing to have a P.M. today. They had not decided just ow they would spend it. There were so many things o do, places to go.

Linda had already told Karen about looking for er when she had gone to the Children's Hospital ith Julian. To her surprise, Karen had gone out or a drive with Peter Travis. "It just—happened," aren said a little hesitatingly. "He stopped at the ospital to see a friend and we met."

"I think that's fine," Linda said happily.

"Peter really is nice," Karen admitted.

By noontime they had decided to go and see Valerie. After that, a movie, if there was time.

Valerie lived on an estate with landscaped grounds nd lovely gardens. Mrs. Crandall was gracious and iendly, and Valerie proudly showed them the playoom with its television set and all the toys and gadets that would delight the heart of a child. She introduced them to Timmy, her nurse, and said in a oft voice, "She's almost as nice as you, Miss Linda." hey took a look at Sarah-Belle in her fine new othes and shoes and Valerie said regretfully that ennygig had had to go to the cleaner's.

Valerie's eyes were bright and there was a healthy low on her face, and Karen and Linda came away

feeling happy about her. At last she was getting over the horror of the tornado and the tragic loss of her parents.

The next day Linda assisted Dr. Edson in surgery. He was removing an adenoma from the thyroid gland of a tall, rather youngish patient. There was no sound in the O.R. except the clink of instruments. But Linda noticed that Dr. Edson's hand hadn't seemed too steady when she'd slapped those instruments against his palm.

When the operation was over, he turned a strange grayish color and Linda thought he was going to have a stroke. She persuaded him to sit down and brought a glass of water and a cold compress for his head. He pushed both away.

"I'm all right," he said impatiently. "Nothing's the matter. Nothing."

But the following day Linda heard that Dr. Edson was retiring and that Dr. Julian Paige would take his place as chief of staff.

Evelyn Delaney was the first one to telephone and congratulate Julian. Linda, answering the phone had recognized her clear, crisp voice, and when she had turned, Julian was there to take the call, a look of pleasure on his dark face.

The next night the phone rang in the cottage about nine o'clock. Karen was out somewhere. Linda hoped she was with Peter Travis. She answered the phone and recognized Hilda's voice. "Linda, could you come out here right away? Betsy is very ill. I think maybe you could help her. I'm really terribly worried."

"I'll be there in fifteen minutes." Linda hung up and dialed for a taxi. By the time it got there, she was dressed in a fresh uniform and cap, with her cape thrown around her shoulders.

The taxi made good time getting to the hospital. umping out, Linda ran up the the steps of the ain entrance and hurried up to the big room. It was ery quiet there. The children were sleeping in their nall beds and there was only one light burning, a im one not far from Betsy's bed.

Hilda, who had been on double duty for three ays, looked all in. Hard work she could take, she id, but the bad part was that there was so little she ould do for this poor baby. "She has a high fever nd the doctor is giving her something to reduce it, ut so far there hasn't been any change."

Linda stood beside the bed looking at Betsy, who eemed to be in a sort of stupor, her breath coming ith difficulty.

Linda turned to Hilda impulsively. "Look," she id, "you go and get some sleep. Even two hours ould help."

"Make me as good as new." Hilda smiled wanly. he took another look at the child, shook her head orriedly when she'd taken her temperature again. No drop. Here's the chart. There's another dose of ever medicine at ten-thirty, if there's no change."

Linda nodded, and Hilda, saying she'd be back n an hour, walked noiselessly down the corridor be- ween the beds.

Linda hardly took her eyes away from Betsy's little imson face. Once the baby sighed, moved restlessly.

Linda didn't realize how long she'd been sitting ere when she saw that Betsy's eyes were open. But e looked at her without recognition.

Linda leaned over the bed and said softly, "Betsy?" he child's eyes opened wide. She stared at her for a oment, then gave a little cry. She knew her now, inda was sure. She found a tiny robe at the foot of e bed, slipped it around the child and lifted her in er arms. When she sat down in the old-fashioned,

armless rocker, Betsy snuggled against her and sighed contentedly.

Linda hardly realized how long she sat there holding Betsy close against her. Her arms felt numb, but she wouldn't shift her position as Betsy had fallen asleep and, this time, Linda felt that it was a more natural sleep.

At ten-thirty, Betsy's forehead was moist and she felt safe in not giving the child the medicine Hilda had left for her.

Somehow she managed, without waking Betsy, to slip a thermometer under the child's arm and hold it there the required time. Temperature a little more than a hundred.

Betsy slept quietly, sweetly. Linda looked down at the little face, the soft brown curls, and tears came into her eyes. If only things could turn out right for this baby.

It was three o'clock before Hilda came back. "Linda, I'm so sorry!" she exclaimed contritely. "Can you ever forgive me?"

"You were worn-out. It's all right. And Betsy is a lot better."

Linda put the child in her bed. She woke up just enough to give her a sleepy smile, then closed her eyes again. Linda made a notation on the chart as to the time the fever began to drop, and told Hilda good night.

When she went down to call a cab, she was surprised to find that the switchboard was not operated after midnight.

Then she remembered that there was an "owl" bus from the Country Club. She'd have to catch that. But when it would come was problematical.

She hurried to the street and stood under a dim street light, her nurse's cape drawn closely round her as the morning air was decidedly cold.

She waited fifteen minutes by her watch. Another fteen. Still no bus of any kind. What if it didn't come t all? Well, she'd have to walk and that was all there as to it.

It was a quarter after four when she became ware that a car was stopping at the curb directly in ront of her. She heard a voice:

"Linda, what in the name of all that's holy are ou doing out here?"

It was Phil. She said, with a relieved laugh, "If ou'll take me home, I'll explain."

Phil opened the door and she hopped in.

"All right, let's have it," he demanded.

Linda explained about Betsy's illness and Hilda's versleeping, as Phil drove along slowly, something e seldom did. When she'd finished, he gave an exas- erated sound. "Linda, you can't look after the whole orld, you know."

"Nurses have an obligation to help whenever and herever they can."

"Bosh! You do your job and let the other fellow do is." He shrugged. "No use talking to you, though. ou've got a complex about the other fellow."

He speeded up then. Sixty. Seventy. Then seventy- ve.

"Don't drive so fast," Linda urged. "A few min- tes more getting back won't matter."

But Phil didn't pay any attention to her. He must ave been making eighty when they heard the sound f a motorcycle behind them.

"That does it," Phil muttered, as he slid to a stop, he motorcycle officer now beside the car.

"Look, Officer," Phil said, "I'm Doctor Phil Man- y on my way to the Bennett Memorial Hospital."

"Well, that's not where you're going now. All peeders are taken to Judge Echol's night court."

"Wh-aat?"

"Orders. Put into effect yesterday—and high time too. They're really getting hard-boiled about speeders in this town. Let's get going."

Phil took out his billfold, but quickly changed his mind. This was a young cop, and no doubt he had idealistic notions about his job. Phil felt certain he could pay a fine and get it over with, but trying to bribe a cop was something else again.

They all filed into the police judge's courtroom on the main floor of the City Hall. It was a dingy room, the judge's chair and desk on a rostrum, stiff chairs and benches in a row below. There were several sleepy-eyed, unhappy-looking people sitting around. Phil and Linda took their places with them.

The judge was old, with a gnarled face and cold gray eyes. When Phil's time came, Linda was instructed to go up before the judge with him.

Phil began smoothly, "Judge Echols, I'm Philip Manley—"

"Your names will be taken down by the clerk," the judge broke in brusquely. Then he looked at the fresh-faced motorcycle policeman. "Charge?"

"Speeding, Your Honor. I clocked him at eighty."

"Has he been arrested for speeding before, or any other charge? Look on the books."

The policeman came back quickly. "No, Your Honor."

"One hundred dollars. Next time you're caught you won't get off so easily. Next case."

At last, at long last, Phil drew up in front of the cottage. It had seemed an endless night.

"I'm sorry, Phil," Linda said unhappily. "If you hadn't picked me up, maybe you—we—wouldn't have got in trouble."

Phil gave a short laugh. "I'll forgive you for one small, very tiny, favor."

Linda was instantly on her guard. She didn't answer.

"One very small kiss," Phil declared.

"Please don't be like that," Linda pleaded, as she stepped from the car.

Phil leaned out. "I don't know what you do to me, Linda. I can't get you out of my mind. But someday I'm going to kiss you, and make you like it."

Linda said nothing aloud. But inside her, a stubborn little voice was saying, "I don't think you will. No, I don't think you will."

CHAPTER ELEVEN

Linda would have overslept if Karen hadn't awakened her, and Karen herself had not gotten up as early as usual. "We're going to have to hurry," she said.

After dressing, Linda took another glance at herself in the mirror. She'd tried hard, using hot water then cold on her face, but she certainly didn't look refreshed or rested. The strain of the night showed plainly. Oh, well, just one night's sleep and she'd be okay.

The first person she saw at the hospital was Julian. He gave her one of his direct looks, frowning a little. "Better try getting a little more sleep, Miss Stephens," he said in his cool, professional voice, and Linda answered quietly, "Yes, Doctor." It was the nearest he had ever come to reprimanding her for anything.

It was a fairly quiet day. No emergencies. No new cases. Two operations before noon, one a tonsillectomy on which Linda worked with Julian. Everything went smoothly. But it seemed a long day.

Linda had never looked forward to anything so much as she did to getting off-duty and going to the cottage for a shower and an early bed.

Then, too, she still had a little worry about Betsy. She'd found time to phone out there, but Hilda wasn't on duty and the other nurse had answered noncommittally, saying that the child was getting along "as well as could be expected." That meant nothing at all. Had the fever returned? Linda wished she knew where to find Hilda.

At last it was six o'clock. Linda had just started o the elevator when one of the new nurses Julian had ound came to her looking worried.

"Mrs. King insists on seeing the super, but Miss my is off the floor and I don't know what to do. ou're her assistant, aren't you?"

"In a way. I'll see if I can help."

She went into Madelon King's room, which had een converted into a sort of bower. Flowers everyhere, silk sheets, luxurious toilet articles, looking ather out of place on the plain metal dresser, and Iadelon King herself, hair beautifully dressed, face elicately made up, but wearing a look of petulance.

Linda explained that the superintendent had been alled to another floor and asked if she could help, as ne sometimes acted in the superintendent's place. he added, "I think you remember me."

"Perhaps you can, Miss Stephens," the woman said n a low, well-modulated voice. "I'm quite certain nat nothing would keep my doctor, Julian Paige, way from me when he knows I need him. I've sent or him several times and he doesn't come, so I'm onvinced that he hasn't received my messages. Will ou please see that he knows I need him?"

"Certainly," Linda promised, and left the room. She found Julian just going into the office. "Mrs. ing feels neglected," she told him. "She thinks ou've failed to get her messages."

"I got them all right," Julian said almost grimly. hen he made a quick gesture. "Oh, well, I'm in for , I suppose." He started out, but glanced back and dded, "Come along with me."

Linda wondered, with a certain amusement, if he lt that he needed protection. She walked beside im and waited just inside the door of Mrs. King's oom.

The woman gave Julian a dazzling smile. "Doc-

tor, I knew you wouldn't stay away from me pur posely. That's why I asked this girl, this other nurs —" She glanced at the door and saw Linda standin there. "Really, Doctor, I think we should be alone don't you?"

Julian cast an almost-pleading glance at Linda but she said quietly, "I was just leaving, Mrs. King Good night."

After supper in the cafeteria, Linda started for th cottage, still thinking about Julian and his predica ment. This silly woman only wanted to try and see i she could get him to make love to her. And Julia was so decent and so kind. Everybody liked him an women just couldn't help falling in love with him Though much good it did them; to Julian, mos women were a real nuisance.

Karen was sewing. She glanced up and smiled whe Linda came in, then went on with her work.

Linda sank into a chair and pushed off her Ox fords. "I could sleep a whole year," she said.

Karen put down her sewing. "What happened las night, Linda? How on earth did you come to be wit Phil?"

Linda looked at her in surprise. "How did yo know I was with Phil?"

"Well, honey, it's all over town, as well as the ho pital. Haven't you seen the papers?"

Shaking her head, Linda looked at Karen wit suddenly horror-stricken eyes. This could mean rea trouble.

"Some of the girls told me about it, so I got a cop of the *Evening Times*. Those darn reporters—the never skip anything." Karen drew a newspaper fro between the sides of the wing chair. "Read it, bu you won't like it."

Linda took the paper and began to read:

Young Dr. Philip Manley and his pretty girl friend, Miss Linda Stephens, were brought into Judge Echols' court about four-thirty this morning. Dr. Manley admitted that he was doing eighty miles. The judge fined him a hundred dollars and gave him a stern warning. Both Dr. Manley and Miss Stephens are employed by Bennett Memorial Hospital.

Linda sank back against her chair, her mouth uivering.

"It'll be all right, Linda," Karen said comfortingly.

But Linda wasn't sure it would be. Bennett Memorial had certain strict rules. They were lenient bout some of their rules, but there were others that ıust be observed to the letter. Being out at extremely ıte hours was one of them, and being taken to the olice station—well, that was ten times worse.

Next morning she'd just finished with trays, baths nd rounds on Fourth, when she was summoned to)r. Edson's office on the first floor.

She knocked and was told to come in. Dr. Edson vas sitting behind a big carved desk writing and he id not look up.

"Sit down, Miss Stephens." He indicated a chair in ront of his desk.

Linda sat down, drew a slow, painful breath.

After what seemed an endless time, Dr. Edson lotted the ink on the sheet of paper on which he'd een writing and placed it carefully in the wire basket n his desk.

He then fixed his cold gray eyes on Linda's face.

"Bennett Memorial, Miss Stephens," he began, "is conservative institution. We have often been acused of being old-fashioned. But we pride outselves n being fair to our staff. Even though there is a rul-

ing which forbids nurses and doctors from havin dates, it is not strictly enforced. This is because w believe, in the long run, a certain amount of associa tion between our doctors and nurses may be of mu tual benefit." He stopped, drew a deep breath, the threw out his hands in a quick gesture. "But you, I'm sorry to say, have taken advantage of our leniency. A a result, the hospital has received some very unplea ant publicity. What do you suppose people will thin of a nurse who stays out on a date until after fou o'clock in the morning?"

"Dr. Edson, it wasn't that way at all—I mean, if— you understood—" Linda was very confused. She wa also beginning to be angry.

He waved her to silence. "Unfortunately, the fac speak for themselves. From now on, you will hav no dates with any doctor in this hospital. You wi give up your afternoons off and you are not to leav the grounds for a period of one month. If there is fu ther infraction of our rules, you will be dismissed.

She rose, a rush of crimson rising to her face. "Do tor Edson, you're not being fair—"

He turned his eyes to the door. "That is all, Mi Stephens."

She was dismissed. He wouldn't let her tell her sid of the story. Linda's anger increased as she went t the elevator. Not even the lowest criminal would b judged without having a chance to speak for himsel

She ought to have told Dr. Edson what she thoug of his highhandedness and resigned right then an there. But a cautious voice inside her reminded h that leaving under such conditions wouldn't mak it easy to get another place. And she loved Benne Memorial.

Things, however, were even more difficult whe Julian joined her as she started down to the cafeter in the late afternoon.

His face was grim and set. "I'm sorry, Linda, that ur little escapade got in the papers. Phil should ve known better than to keep you out so late. Next ne have it understood with him that he must bring u home at a decent hour."

Her breath came painfully as she looked at him, ıt Julian had turned away and was going toward e office, walking with an impatient stride.

She would have thought that Julian, of all people, ɔuld have given her a chance to defend herself. But ɔ, he took the attitude that she was to blame. He ɔuld probably believe that Dr. Edson was right in sciplining her so severely. Angry tears rose to her es. She could have taken this more easily from anyıe else in the world.

Once again the thought came that she should re-gn, effective immediately. No one believed in her. ıt once again she heard that cautious little inner ice urging her to wait.

Somehow the long days went by. Linda did her ork with her usual efficiency, tried to eat the monotıous cafeteria food, went to the cottage afterwards d usually sat there alone. Karen was out much more ten than she used to be, and while Linda wasn't re, she hoped that she was dating Peter Travis. This ıs what she needed.

Madelon King had been dismissed at last, and the y she left the hospital, it seemed as if everybody ew a sigh of relief. There was a rumor that she had oposed to Julian, telling him that they would go to enna, where he could put in a year or two of inısive study. She was clever enough to know that this ıs a dream close to every doctor's heart. But Julian idently hadn't been interested.

Linda met him in the corridors and in the small of-e, but he had little to say beyond a few instructions. ıe old warmth and camaraderie were sadly lacking.

It was different with Amy. She knew in some intu
tive way that Linda had not been to blame, althou
she had not talked the matter over with her.

One morning they had a few moments together a
Amy said, "However this trouble came about, Lind
I know you are blameless. You see, I know the kind
girl you are."

"Thank you, Amy. Thank you very much." Linda
voice was tremulous with feeling.

"We are both believers, aren't we?"

"Yes, oh, yes," Linda said quickly.

"Then let's leave it with God. Things have
way of straightening themselves out when we
that, you know."

Linda actually managed a smile. "Yes, I know," s
said softly, a sudden light in her eyes.

There was so little time to talk. But Amy had tak
time from working over the charts to say those fe
words, and Linda felt warmed through her whc
body.

The phone was ringing in the office as she we
down the corridor, and she hurried to answer it.
before, Linda recognized Hilda's voice immediate
She clutched the phone tightly. Had something ha
pened to Betsy?

"Linda, could you come out here right awa
Something has come up. Something that may be i
portant."

"Is Betsy all right?" Linda asked shakily.

"She's all right. She's fine now. It's somethi
else. Please get here as close to seven as you can."

Linda had to think fast. But whatever Hil
wanted to see her about, it must have something
do with Betsy, and regardless of everything, she wou
go.

CHAPTER TWELVE

At the evening meal in the cafeteria, Linda told her house mate about the call from Hilda, and Karen volunteered to go out to Children's Hospital with her.

They didn't even take time to change their uniforms, and by six-thirty they were on their way. They had to transfer at Main and Madison, but the Raleigh Springs bus was luckily right on the dot.

The bus creaked and jogged along with provoking slowness after they'd left the crowded city, but they made it only a few minutes after seven.

Hilda was, as usual, sitting close to Betsy's bed, and nearby sat a man in the rough clothes of a laborer, holding his cap in his hand. He had a kindly face but looked worried. Little Betsy was sleeping peacefully, a tiny bit of color in her face.

Hilda introduced the man at once. "This is Mr. Davis, Betsy's uncle. Miss Stephens and Miss Winslow."

Both girls said quietly, "How do you do, Mr. Davis?"

The man fingered his cap a little nervously. "The nurse says you like Betsy and that you might could take her home with you. To—keep, I mean," he faltered, not quite meeting their eyes.

Linda's heart gave a happy little lurch. Could they do it? Would it be all right? She could feel Karen's excitement as she stood there beside her. Linda was feeling excited herself. She certainly hadn't expected this, hadn't even dreamed of such a thing happening.

"We got four kids of our own and another on acomin'," the man mumbled awkwardly. "My wife she don't want Betsy. She ain't got nothing agains the kid, but she thinks six kids to do for is more'n sh can manage. And my job—well, it's not so good, an we're going to the oil fields in Californy in a fe weeks. So if you'd take the kid—" He broke of added, "I know you'd do right by her and she's pret smart, too."

Linda caught Karen's shining eyes. "Of course we' take her. Of course we will," Karen said eagerly.

Linda thought quickly. It could be managed Naturally they'd have to make plans. But she knev everything could be worked out splendidly. She an Karen would share the care of Betsy in the evening and when they were at work there was Jane. Jane wa always hanging around looking for a job. It woul work out. Oh, she was sure it would.

Karen nudged Linda. "Tell him! Tell him we' take her."

Linda said at once, "We'll be glad to take Betsy Mr. Davis. We—we will be good to her and—an love her a lot."

The man gave a sigh of relief. "They said I had t take her home tonight and I dunno what my wif might have done."

"We'll take her with us now," Karen put i quickly.

"Thank you. Thank you, Miss." The man threw look at the sleeping child. "After all, she's my poo sister's kid, and I want her to be looked after."

The man said good night, then, and left.

Hilda told them she'd had to wait here for th man, and all at once she'd had the thought of callin Linda. "Darn it all," she exclaimed, "I'm so happy could cry."

"So could I," said Linda, her voice unsteady.

Karen was standing by the bed, smiling down at he sleeping child.

Hilda said, "I've got her things packed and now ve'll have to wake her." She went over to the bed. Betsy, Betsy, wake up, honey. Wake up!" she said oftly.

The child opened her eyes slowly. But when she aw Linda, she smiled and sat up.

"Come on, let's get dressed, darling," Hilda said eelingly. "You're going to have a real mother now—wo of them."

Soon the child was dressed in the plain, simple lothes brought with her, most of them cheap, but crupulously clean.

On their way back in the taxi, Betsy sat in Linda's ap, her head against her shoulder, making small ounds of contentment. It was wonderful, wonderful, o have her like this.

"We're going to be two very busy people," Linda aid. "This little girl needs everything and she's going o have it. Good thing you know how to sew, Karen; 'm not so good at it."

"You can learn. Now that we're mothers, there re lots of things to learn. But after all, Betsy's really ot three mothers, counting Jane. Oh, Linda, isn't it ust—just too wonderful! Do you feel like crying? I o. I'm so happy."

It was a moment before Linda spoke. Then her oice came softly, "I feel like praying. We must ask God to help us to do our very best for Betsy."

"We'll do that, Linda. We want to get started out ight."

When they reached the cottage, Linda lost no time n getting over to the hospital. She was lucky enough o find Amy at her desk and, for once, not too busy to alk for a minute. Linda had Dr. Abbott's instruc-ons for feeding the child and knew that everything

needed could be found in the storeroom. So she to
Amy what she wanted, adding that of course sh
would pay for it.

Amy agreed with a smile. "Help yourself, Lind
But I can't imagine why you need such things."

Linda suddenly became flustered. "As a matter
fact, Amy, I have a baby. I mean we—we have."

"May I ask who is 'we'?" Amy's voice was almo
sharp.

"Karen, Jane and me."

Amy's nice face wore a little pucker. "Go on, Lind
And begin at the beginning."

When Linda had finished her explanation, Am
said thoughtfully, "I suppose it's all right, since yo
have Jane during the day. But it—it does seem a li
tle irregular. We don't want any more gossip aroun
here. As you know, there's too much already."

"I'll see Doctor Edson the first thing in the mor
ing."

Amy shook her head. "No," she said. "You see Ju
ian Paige. Doctor Edson is still the executive hea
but Julian is the head doctor."

Linda asked the orderly to bring over a baby b
with the necessary sheets and things, and when sh
started back, she stopped at Jane's cottage and aske
her to come home with her for a while.

Jane was in robe and slippers and had cold crea
on her face. "What's up?" she asked.

"A surprise," Linda smiled.

"Lemme wipe my face. Guess I don't have to dress

"Considering it's right next door, no."

She was still feeling excited. She opened the co
tage door, and there was Karen walking the floor wi
the baby, who was crying.

"Heaven bless my soul, what are you doing wi
that beautiful baby?" Jane exclaimed. "And wha
the matter with her?"

"That's plain. She wants Linda. She thought ne'd gone and left her," Karen answered, walking to-ard Linda.

Betsy was smiling through her tears now and lean-ng far out of Karen's arm, trying to reach Linda.

Linda took the child in her arms, and at once Betsy egan patting her face and cooing.

Jane sat down a little limply in the big chair. "Will omeone explain? Who's the mother—I mean, here—?"

"Linda's the mother. I mean, you are—that is, we ll are," Karen answered confusedly.

Jane fixed her keen eyes on Linda, who said uickly, "I'm just her make-believe mother, Jane. ike you're going to be and like Karen is. That's what he meant."

"It's still a little mixed-up, but I get the fact that e're all going to be mothers. And that suits me fine. ve always wanted a baby."

The orderly came in with the baby bed, and be-ore Jane and Karen had it completely ready, Betsy as sound asleep.

When Linda had undressed the baby and put her n the bed without even awakening her, Jane hovered ver the little bed. "A little *bambino,* think of that! or a long time I've been wondering what I'm still icking around this old earth for. Now I know."

Jane almost didn't go home, she was so entranced. ut the girls reminded her that she'd have to be on he job early in the morning and needed her sleep, so he reluctantly left, after taking another long look t the child.

Next morning she appeared just as the girls were uttoning up their uniforms, pulling a rocking chair ith her. "I'll probably be using this more over here han in my own place," she said by way of explana-on.

The following day Karen had a P.M., and she pu the time to good use. She went shopping, came bac with yards and yards of material for little dresses an underthings for Betsy, plus socks and shoes, not fo getting a pretty coat and cap of a delicate blue. Sh was sewing like mad when Linda came in.

"Can't you even stop for supper?" Linda wante to know. "Better go over to the cafeteria."

"Oh, I will. Look, Linda, Jane and I finished on nightgown, some underthings and a dress today. I'v got one little sleeve to sew in. Our baby is going t look mighty pretty tomorrow."

"You bet she will," Linda said happily. She wen into the bedroom and looked at Betsy, lying aslee in the tiny bed between the two twin beds. Ther was just room enough.

Betsy lay on her back, one plump arm throw over her head, the other holding tightly to the pin plastic rabbit Karen had bought for her.

She looked so fresh and sweet in the dainty littl nainsook gown that Linda could hardly keep fro bending over and kissing her. But Betsy still had a lo of sleep to make up for and every hour was valu able for her.

Linda went back to the living room, where Kare had finished putting the sleeve in the dress and no held it up for her to see.

"It's darling," Linda said, smiling. "But you'd be ter hurry over to the cafeteria."

"Okay." Karen folded the tiny dress and put away. "I had an awful time making Jane go hom She thinks she ought to spend the night, too." Sh gave Linda a quick smile. "Isn't it wonderful to be mother, even a secondhand one?"

"You bet it's wonderful!"

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

Linda had tried several times to see Julian and ave a talk with him about Betsy. It seemed to her as Julian were purposely avoiding her, though it was ard to believe. The knowledge hurt. It hurt somehere deep down in her heart. Didn't Julian like her ny more, even as a friend and co-worker?

One afternoon about a week after Linda and Karen ad brought Betsy home with them, she found Julian n the office. He was sitting in a chair near a window, ooking out, and he didn't hear her when she came in.

Linda said, her voice trembly, "Could I see you or a few minutes?"

He turned his head and she saw that his blue eyes ere grave, unsmiling. "Not now, Linda. In about vo minutes, I have an appointment."

"I see." She turned to go.

"Wait a minute." Julian was studying his watch. I'll be through at seven . . . If you want to see me, ow about going uptown for dinner. We might even ance a little."

This was so unexpected that Linda couldn't speak or a moment. When she found her voice, she was so onscious of his steady eyes upon her, that she ounded confused. "I'm so sorry. I mean, I—I can't."

"It's quite all right," he said hurriedly. "I understand." And Linda found herself looking after his ll, erect figure as he walked out the door.

"No, you don't understand," she said to herself, in sad little voice. "Julian, you don't understand at l."

He evidently didn't know that she was not per mitted to leave the grounds. Of course she had dare to go out to the Children's Hospital, regardless of be ing under discipline, and she would never be sorr for that, no matter what happened to her. But goin on a date with Julian was different.

On Wednesday, Amy told her that Dr. Edso wanted to see her, and this time Linda felt certai she was really in for a bad time. No doubt, Dr. Edso knew she'd left the grounds . . . Or it might b about Betsy. Maybe he wouldn't let them keep he

Linda was really worried. The whole staff kne that Dr. Edson didn't send for anyone unless it wa for an important reason and it usually had to do wit some infraction of the rules.

The doctor received her with his usual cold dig nity. "Sit down, Miss Stephens."

She took the straight chair at the opposite end o the big desk, and tried to look relaxed while her fi gers dug into her palms.

To her surprise, he looked directly at her, a sma smile playing about his thin lips. "Doctor Manle has at last found time to explain to me that you ha not been on a date with him the night the—er unfo tunate incident happened. I was very glad to hea this."

His voice stopped and Linda waited, hardly darin to breathe. She could read nothing from his expre sion.

"I am also aware," the doctor went on after a lon pause, "that you left the grounds when under disc pline."

"I did," Linda admitted in a low voice.

Then, surprisingly, she heard his voice, though sh thought at first she must be dreaming. "I find bot actions highly commendable."

Linda stared at him, her eyes wide.

The doctor sat there making a tent with his fingers, is gray eyes intent and narrowed. "I'm very sorry ou did not tell me you had been out at the Chil- en's Hospital, helping with this sick child and re- eving an overworked nurse. There is nothing more mmendable in a nurse than compassion, a desire to lp where help is needed."

"You are very kind," Linda mumured, and started rise. He motioned her to remain seated.

"The rest of this belongs to Doctor Paige's prov- nce. But as I'm still the titular head of Bennett, I'll on with it. I mean about the child, the one you rought home with you."

Linda looked at him, her eyes pleading. "She— eeded us so. She has no one. Her uncle doesn't want er."

He nodded. "We have taken this into account. But uch a situation is highly irregular." Once again he aused. Then the little bleak smile played again bout his lips. "But I have decided that it will be all ght to keep this child, since Jane will be on the job nd there will be no disruption of your hours on hos- ital duty."

Again that little smile. Linda started to speak, but e went on, "In fact, I think the whole hospital staff ill be relieved to know that Jane has a regular job. lso," he continued, "I wish to commend you on the ork you've done to relieve Amy. You've shown good dgment and good sense. In your next salary check ou'll find a substantial raise, and it is our wish that ou continue to assist Amy whenever she needs you."

Linda felt overwhelmed. So many good things were ppening all at once, she was thinking. Aloud, she id, "Thank you, Doctor Edson. I appreciate your nfidence in me."

She rose and moved toward the door.

"One other thing," the doctor added. "Of course

you understand that you are no longer under di cipline in any form. I regret very much that the sit ation wasn't cleared up at once."

They could keep Betsy. That was the main thin Then no further discipline. If she'd only known th yesterday, she might have gone with Julian. The might have understood each other again, might hav regained their old friendship.

Julian's friendship meant so much to her. Som times she was afraid to admit just how important th man himself was to her. She had never been in lov but there were times when she wondered if this fee ing she had for Julian wasn't very close to it. Th thought was frightening. Julian Paige would neve marry. He had told her so himself.

Linda could hardly wait to tell Karen the goo news. Karen knew that Linda had been summoned t Dr. Edson's office and her first fear, like Linda's, wa that it might have something to do with Betsy, an that they couldn't keep her.

Having Betsy with them had made a wonderfu change in Karen. She was always full of plans for th child. Once she'd said, her brown eyes sparkling wit anticipation, "We'll work hard, get in lots of extr duty and save our money. Betsy must have a colleg education. She must have everything."

The clothes Karen had made for Betsy were reall creations and Betsy looked like an angel in them Even the rompers Karen had made were trimme with hand embroidery. And Betsy was beginning t be a robust child and a happy one, after being unde nourished for so long.

When Linda crossed the grounds and went in th cottage, she found Karen walking the floor, whi Betsy sat in her playpen looking neglected. She w even whimpering a bit, but the moment she sa Linda her little face broke into smiles.

Linda lifted her up and sat down in the rocker. ıe looked at her wristwatch. "It's twenty minutes to ven," she said. "Did you feed Betsy at six-thirty?"

"No. No, I didn't. Oh, I'm so sorry." Karen looked if she'd committed a crime.

"It's not much overtime. I'll feed her now. And aren, honey, please sit down and get control of your-lf."

"I know I'm acting like a fool," Karen said, tears in er voice. But she sat down in the big chair.

Linda busied herself with Betsy's formula, after anding the child to Karen. When she came back with ıe bottle, Karen was saying contritely, "Please 'scuse ıe, darling. I won't forget—ever again."

Betsy tried to wriggle out of her arms, reaching for inda.

"She always wants you. She loves you the best, of ourse. But I think she loves me a little. At least, I—hope she does."

"Of course she does. She loves Jane, too. She likes aving three mothers and all the attention she gets." inda was smiling as she sat down in the rocker and ave Betsy her bottle.

It was strange, she was thinking, that so often Karen ad to be reassured that she was loved. Because she ad lost the love of the one person she wanted, she ad ceased to expect love or affection from anyone.

Half an hour later, when Betsy was alseep in her ed, all fresh and rosy from her bath, Linda came ack into the living room to find Karen staring out to the deepening twilight. She looked more natural hen she turned and looked at Linda, even managing pale smile.

"I knew by the expression on your face that old one-Face wasn't going to do anything about Betsy," e said.

"He was really kind," Linda said, sitting down

in the rocker and starting to comb out her curls. "H said if it hadn't been for Jane, we couldn't have mar aged. He made a sort of joke out of it. Said the whol hospital would be relieved to have Jane settled dow with a job."

"We'd die if we had to give Betsy up now," Kare said solemnly.

Linda saw that her eyes were unnaturally brigh "What's happened, Karen?" she asked.

"I—I'm almost beside myself with joy, and I— I'm scared, too. I just can't seem to simmer down. She moved gropingly to the wing chair. "You see, h —Kerry wants to see me. After two years, two lon long years, he wants to see me."

"But Karen—" Linda began, but stopped. Fo Karen's expression had changed to one of entreat

"Don't tell me not to see him, Linda." Karen's ey were almost fervishly bright. "I've got to see hin Can't you see I've got to? Just to look into his ey again, to—to—" She couldn't finish, but covered h face with her hands.

Linda lay awake for a long time after they went t bed. Love could be a tormenting, heartbreakin thing. She could only hope that Karen wouldn't d anything reckless.

HAPTER FOURTEEN

It was almost winter, but the world was a olden blaze of beauty. Under cloudless blue skies, ie trees still wore their magnificent frocks of scarlet nd deep yellows. Fall roses also lingered, the most eautiful ones Linda had ever seen.

Whenever Linda and Karen had an afternoon off, ney took full advantage of the glorious weather. Lit- e Betsy, in her stroller, chuckled and cooed with elight as they took turns rolling her over the rounds.

Betsy was a cherub of a baby. Often doctors and urses stopped to see her and exclaim over how ealthy and happy she looked.

Karen was very self-possessed these days. She was udying astrology again, and one day she told Linda uite seriously that Julian was the man for her to arry. "I finally had to ask him the day and the ionth he was born. His birthday is October seven- enth. And you're Aries. You should marry a man orn under Libra—and that's Julian's sign."

Here we go again, Linda thought. She laughed. 'm afraid I'll just be an old maid."

"Not you. Aries women are very attractive to the pposite sex. You'll always have chances to get mar- ed."

"Well, that's comforting. But do you really be- eve all that stuff?"

"Of course I do. And I know something now I dn't know before. Kerry wasn't the right one for

me, even if I do—did—love him to distraction. Ou
birthdates are not right."

Karen changed the subject then, to Jane. She sti
had trouble making Jane go home in the late afte
noons. No matter how they argued that she neede
rest, Jane would toss her gray head and say, "No
you know I'm as strong as a horse."

"She is, too," Linda agreed, "even though she
seventy-five. It's amazing."

It was true that Jane had the strength and vigor o
a woman of forty. But sometimes Linda wondered
between the three of them, they weren't lavishing to
much love on Betsy. This could be overdone, she su
posed. But how could a child ever have too muc
love? Statistics gathered by the Recreation Progra
for Hospitalized and Orphaned children easily prove
that the child who was much loved in infancy wa
normal in every way and grew both in strength an
beauty.

Linda hadn't heard much of the Recreation Pr
gram of late. In fact, she hadn't had a real chance t
talk to Julian for weeks. She knew that Evelyn D
laney called him nearly every day and always h
seemed delighted to talk to her.

Then one afternoon a few days later, Julian caug
up with her as she started down the entrance step
"How about Jimmy's?" he asked. "I've got exact
one hour and twenty-two minutes. No need to dress
he put in quickly. "You look nice. As a matter of fac
you always look good to me."

"Thanks for the kind words," Linda said fli
pantly, to hide the happiness that swept over he

It was wonderful to be sitting beside Julian agai
The last time she had talked with him, he had seeme
cold and aloof. Would he be like himself now? Sh

ped fervently that he would, and stole a quick nce at his thin, dark face.

He turned and met her eyes. "You haven't been ing Phil lately, have you?"

"No. I don't believe Phil was ever really interested me."

There was a look of bewilderment in his eyes. "But hought— It seemed—" He broke off, and speeded . "I'm hungry as a bear," he said. Then he flashed r a quick smile. "It's nice to have you sitting here side me, even if I do have to hurry like mad. here's always so little time."

Perhaps, Linda was thinking, because most of his e evenings were taken up with Evelyn Delaney. Julian was looking at her now, a smile flashing m his lips to his eyes. "We really should find time r a real celebration, both of us forging ahead. But at will have to come later. Just now I—I've got one those urges." His smile was teasing now.

"Another one?" Linda didn't understand what he eant.

"Once—some time ago—I guess you don't remem- r—we were on the grounds and suddenly a little ischievous moon peeped out from behind some ouds and shone right on your face. Such a sweet rnest little face it is, and—well, I wanted to kiss u. The queer thing is, I still do."

"Think nothing of it," Linda said airily, but with r heart beating high in her throat. "It's just the me old propinquity at work."

"You're turning into a coquette, a tease," Julian ddenly declared. Then he exclaimed, "Look, the oon again!"

He was stopping the car now. The next moment had her in his arms, his lips against hers.

It was a kiss that would live long in her memory.

But it was only a kiss. It could have no real meanin
She must make herself realize this. A girl couldn
build dreams on one small kiss, a teasing one at tha

When Julian released her, he looked away an
didn't speak for a long moment. Then he said, h
voice slow, serious, "Maybe it isn't propinquity aft
all. How is a man to know?"

Linda couldn't have answered then if her life ha
depended on it. Julian must have misunderstood h
silence, for suddenly he was contrite. "Linda, I'
afraid I took an unfair advantage."

Linda struggled to find words. At last she said, '
know you were teasing. It's—it's all right."

He speeded up the car, and in a few minutes the
were turning into Jimmy's.

When Linda returned to the cottage, she foun
Betsy asleep, and Karen sitting in the big chair ge
ting ready to start sewing.

Karen was in a talkative mood. "You should hav
seen Betsy tonight when I gave her her bath. I put th
little plastic duck in the water with her and sh
chuckled and talked to it, then she started pushing
around and kicking it with her feet. You should hav
heard her squeal."

"She's the darlingest baby in the world." Lind
slid out of her cape and sat down in the wing chai

"She prattles all the time," Karen went on. "And
believe she's saying words. Won't it be wonderfu
when she can say our names?"

Linda smiled. "It will be wonderful."

Karen sewed for a while. Then she said, "Here
something I want you to read." She drew a lett
from her bag, which was lying on a table beside th
chair, and handed it to Linda.

Linda looked at the letter as though puzzle
"You're sure you want me to read it, Karen?"

"Sure I'm sure."

The letter was from Kerry Lucas:

Karen, my very dear, I can't blame you, of course, for not wanting to see me, but you must understand that I'm now in a position to make amends. I have been successful in my work, but my marriage is not a successful one. I'm going to get a divorce and marry you, just as we planned more than two years ago. As soon as I'm free, I'll come to you, my darling.

When Linda had finished reading the letter, she looked at Karen silently. She couldn't tell anything from her face, and was at a loss to know what to say.

Karen's eyes were bright, but her face was composed. Finally she smiled at Linda and said, "You think I'll marry him, don't you? Well, I shan't. There's one thing I could never forgive him for, and that's his willingness to get a divorce and leave his child."

"He has a child?" Linda looked at her in surprise.

"Yes. A son. I didn't know it myself until about a week ago. He's only a few weeks younger than our Betsy. How could a man—anyone—desert his own child?"

"Lots of people get divorces without giving marriage a real chance."

"Yes, and their poor little children are bewildered and lost."

Linda nodded thoughtfully. In her opinion, children should always be the first consideration.

"There's something else, Linda," Karen resumed after a few minutes. "I don't believe the Recreation Program out at the Children's Hospital is going so well."

Linda nodded. "I was afraid of that. I asked Julian about it not long ago, and I thought he looked a lit-

tle disappointed. But he didn't tell me just what happened out there.'"

"I'll tell you what happened. During the summer, the girls dropped off until there were only three or four left. So many of them went to the beaches and to mountain resorts. And now they're all going to Florida."

"But the program should be carried out." During the summer, Linda had met Evelyn Delaney one day in a tearoom, and had offered her services again. Julian had wanted her to help, and she was only trying to please him. But Evelyn had smiled sweetly and said, "I believe we're getting along very nicely, Miss Stephens. But thank you just the same." Then she'd walked away.

"It seemed such a splendid idea," Karen said unhappily.

The very next day, right after the noon hour, the blow fell.

Linda had an unexpected P.M., and hurried to the cottage right after lunch. She had the usual argument with Jane, who wanted her to go to a movie or somewhere and have a good time. But Linda told her that it might be necessary to go back on duty at seven, and besides, she had lots of things to do around the cottage.

After Jane had reluctantly gone home, Linda gave Betsy her noontime feeding. She couldn't resist rocking her to sleep after she finished, and she held her long after she was sleeping soundly, thinking that Betsy was the most satisfactory baby in the world. She had blossomed like a flower under all the tenderness and love the three of them lavished on her. Linda smiled at the fat little knees, the tiny rose-petal hands that had already learned to reach out for the arms of

he ones she loved. Oh, Betsy was the most beloved aby in the whole world.

Linda put Betsy in her little bed at last and went bout her chores, laundering some of Betsy's dainty hings, some of her own and hose for herself and Ka-en. Then she gave the small living room a good clean-ng, dusting down the walls, even taking down the urtains and giving them a vigorous shaking.

Linda was just getting ready for her own bath vhen she heard a cab stopping in front of the cottage. There was a loud knock on the door, and Linda hur-ied to answer it, wearing robe and slippers, her hair binned high on her head.

Three women stood outside, all with severe hair-do's, grim expressions and outlandish hats.

Linda looked at them in bewilderment, but she aid politely, "Did you wish to see me? Will you come n?" She was thinking that perhaps they had come to he wrong cottage. She had never seen any of them before, and surely they didn't know her.

They came in. Suddenly she had a feeling that hey were here on some ominous mission. But what could it be?

Still looking at them in bewilderment, she asked if hey would have seats.

"No time for that," one of the women snapped, vidently the spokesman for the three. "We are here bout this child Betsy Simmons. We are members of he Prairie County Children's Welfare Board, and ve have come to restore this child to her relatives, he proper place for a child to be."

Linda felt a cold hand clutch at her heart. "But her ncle doesn't want her. He—he asked us to bring her ere and take care of her."

"He had no right to do it. And *you* had no right to ring her here."

One of the others spoke up now. "What makes you think that you, a giddy young girl, could keep this child? You could never adopt her."

"But we give her the best of care. We never leave her alone for a minute. There are three of us to take care of her." Linda made a quick, pleading gesture. "Oh, you can't take her away from us. We love her so much, and she—she's so happy with us."

"She belongs with her natural guardian, her uncle, and we are taking her there. You're an unmarried woman; this child doesn't belong here."

"You don't realize what it means to Betsy to have the love and care we give her. She'd been sick when we brought her here, but she's in splendid health now." Linda was pleading with tears in her eyes.

But the three were adamant. "We have an order from the sheriff of Prairie County for this child, and we'll have no further argument," the first woman declared firmly.

Linda couldn't speak after that. Betsy had been awake for some time. She was playing with the little toys which were strung on her bed and now and then they'd hear her chuckling and talking to herself.

The first woman spoke again. "Bring the child in here. We have no more time to waste. The taxi is waiting and we're wasting the county's money."

Linda dressed Betsy, slipped on her blue coat and cap, her new shoes. Then she packed all her things.

She fought back her tears when she realized, as she brought Betsy into the living room, that this was the last time she would hold "her" baby in her arms. But brokenhearted as she was, Linda was thinking of Karen and what the loss of Betsy would do to her.

The taxi with the three women and the child had just disappeared when Karen came in. She was smiling. "You know Betsy has outgrown her tub, and there's a sale uptown, so I got off a little early to go

up there—" She broke off in alarm. "Linda, what on earth is the matter? Has something happened to Betsy?"

Big tears stood in Linda's eyes, but she was too choked up for speech.

Karen ran into the bedroom and came back. Breathing painfully, she clutched Linda's arm. "Where is she?" she demanded. "What's happened to her? Tell me, Linda."

Linda was getting herself under control. She said, "Sit down, Karen. Please—please, darling."

Karen slid into a chair, her eyes tragic. Linda began explaining about the three women, not leaving out the smallest detail.

"But they can't do that! They can't!"

"They—they've got the law on their side." Linda said unhappily.

"Darn the law. Half the time it's unfair—and especially to children. Those people must be terribly ignorant or they could see that Betsy's better off with us than with her uncle, who doesn't want her." She got up and started pacing the floor. "We've got to get her back, Linda. We've just got to." Karen sat down again, her eyes brimming with tears. "There must be something we can do." She thought for a while. "If we'd only taken out adoption papers. That's what we should have done, Linda."

Linda shook her head. "No," she said. "No, we couldn't have done that. It seems you—you have to have a husband if you—if you—" She couldn't go on.

A look of sudden resolution came to Karen's face. "Then there's one thing certain. One of us will have to get married, pronto, quick, and as of now."

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

The cottage seemed so cold and empty that Karen and Linda could hardly bear to stay there.

Sometimes Linda would awake in the mornings see the little bed between the twin beds and think it was all a dream, that a tiny figure was sleeping there and would wake with a shout of laughter. Then the emptiness struck her like a blow.

As for Jane, she was like a lost soul. She'd come over to the cottage, stay for a few minutes, then hurry out. Perhaps in half an hour, she'd be back, still with nothing to say, her hands restless, her eyes full of pain.

Linda and Karen could go on extra duty, which they frequently did, but poor Jane had nothing to occupy herself with except her thoughts. She seemed to get some comfort from just being in the room with Karen and Linda, in the rooms where she'd bathed the little girl, fed her, played with her and rocked her to sleep.

Sometimes Karen would make a date with Peter Travis, for which Linda was thankful. She thought Peter was a fine young man. He had his own insurance agency and was doing well. One thing troubled Linda, however. Had Karen started having dates with Peter because she'd decided to marry him in order that Betsy might be adopted?

One evening while Karen was dressing to go out with Peter, she said, "I know now that Kerry was

dream I invented. I was just a girl walking around n a fog. I can see now that Kerry and the dream were never the same."

"And Peter Travis?" Linda asked.

Karen narrowed her eyes, thinking. "I'm not sure, Linda. It could be a—a sort of rebound. You see, Peter and I knew each other back in the same little one-horse town. But I just couldn't see him, or anybody else." She stopped, then added, "It's unbelievable how far a girl can go to make a complete idiot of herself over a man."

"A sort of mad infatuation," Linda murmured. "Those who get over it are lucky. Sometimes they don't."

Karen gave her an affectionate smile. "As for you, you're in the same position I was in, but you don't know it, or won't admit it."

"I?" Linda exclaimed, her eyes narrowed in disbelief.

"You won't ever go out with anyone, and it's not because you don't have chances."

"I'm usually busy."

"That isn't the reason."

Linda was relieved that Karen didn't pursue the subject. She knew exactly what she meant. Julian Paige, of course.

Didn't she know Julian was going to marry Evelyn Delaney? That was the talk all over the hospital, although no engagement had as yet been announced.

Julian only smiled when his friends teased him about soon having a ball and chain about his neck.

Things were running smoothly at Bennett now. Third and fourth floors filled, a few patients down on second. None dangerously ill, which always made everybody feel good.

Some of the patients played jokes on the nurses and on each other. One of them, a young man, in-

sisted on making love to Linda. That was part of the routine, too.

Sometimes the hospital seemed like a big noisy family, some of the patients a little spoiled and peevish, others always ready for jokes and laughter.

There were a few mishaps, of course. An elderly woman patient, in one of those new automatic wheel chairs, started to wheel herself out to the terrace, even though it was too cool to sit out there. In some way the chair got out of control, ran amuck down the long corridor while ambulatory patients, doctors and nurses scattered in every direction. It was Phil who managed finally to get hold of the chair and stop it. No damage to anything except a tray of food that had been knocked out of Karen's hands. And Karen herself had been almost knocked off her feet. They'd laughed about it afterward in the cottage.

Karen said that night after they'd gone to bed, "I've got to see Betsy, Linda. We'll get a P.M. and go out there. Those hateful, ignorant old women can't stop us from doing that." She broke off to ask if they didn't have a P.M. coming up.

"We should have, but I don't know exactly when."

"We must go the quickest possible moment," Karen insisted.

The easy routine was disrupted the next day. Two emergencies and more patients, one serious heart case.

When Linda was leaving the cafeteria in the late afternoon, Phil overtook her. He tossed away his cigarette and reached for her arm. "What's your hurry?" he wanted to know.

"I've got to relieve Amy."

"You would," Phil complained. "Look, I want to talk to you. How much time do you have?"

Linda looked at her watch. "About half an hour."

"All right then. Here goes. This is important, inda. In fact, this is a proposal of marriage."

"It's what?" Linda gasped in surprise, not realing how inelegant her words sounded.

"I'm asking you to marry me," Phil said with ffended dignity. "At least you could listen courteusly."

"But, Phil, you—you're not in love with me. You on't even believe in love."

"I could be and I am," he said grimly. "I've done verything I could to get you out of my life. I didn't ucceed. And now you've got this obsession about this nild and you need a husband. So I'm a candidate."

Linda stood there looking at him in astonishment. he thought this must surely be the strangest proosal any girl had ever received. At last she said, Phil, I want you to know that I appreciate your—our understanding and the honor you offer me."

"Then we might as well start making plans. After e're married—"

"*After we're married—*" Linda echoed incredusly. She started to say something more, but Phil nterrupted her.

"I realize this is a surprise to you, Linda. I've honstly tried to become interested in other girls, but it as no good. You're the one I want."

"But, Phil—" Linda began objecting, only to be nterrupted again.

"I know marriage isn't a perfect institution. It's ll of flaws. But there's always a way out if it doesn't ork."

"But that isn't the way to look at it," Linda broke indignantly. "People who get married should make work. They make solemn vows." Then suddenly e said, "I've got to go, Phil."

He nodded, his eyes warm. "See you tomorrow Linda lovely."

Still feeling bewildered, Linda nodded and hur ried to the cottage.

After a quick shower, she felt much better. She went to Amy's office and found Julian there.

He gave her an unsmiling glance. "I didn't know you were coming back tonight." Then he added "Amy will be back in a minute." Julian stood there still looking at her. "You're working too hard and you're still grieving about that child. Now is that showing good practical sense?"

"No, I suppose it isn't," Linda murmured. She was wondering just why Julian seemed so unlike himself. It seemed strange not to see his nice smile or to have his voice light and teasing. It was quite plain that he had something very serious on his mind.

"Do you realize how much weight you've lost Linda?" Julian suddenly questioned.

"No, I hadn't noticed."

"You're not being realistic, and you should be Haven't you got this matter straightened out, the way you want it?"

She looked at him, not understanding what he meant. At that moment the phone rang.

Linda answered. It was Evelyn Delaney. She handed the phone to Julian and started to leave, but he motioned her to come back.

She couldn't help overhearing his words. He was saying, "Yes, yes, of course I'm glad you're back. Then, "No. I'm sorry. I'm very busy. Good night Evelyn."

He replaced the receiver and turned to Linda again. "If you keep on looking like a little white ghost, I'm going to send you on a month's leave of absence."

"You can't do that to me. I won't go."

"Oh, yes, you will. You forget—I'm the boss." There was a tiny glimmer of a smile in Julian's eyes, but it faded quickly. He sat down on the edge of Amy's desk.

"Tomorrow morning I'm going to operate on the little Branson girl. At six o'clock. I'd like to have you with me."

"I'll be there, Julian."

He nodded. "After we're finished—and say a prayer for me tonight, won't you, Linda?—you'll have the day off."

When she started to protest, he said, "Doctor's orders," and there was again that little smile trying to light somewhere on his face, only it didn't succeed.

He raised his hand in a salute and left.

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

Linda knew she'd never forget so long as she lived those hours in the surgery with Julian and the other doctors, nurses and internes. No one but Julian believed this operation could be done successfully. Phil had tried again to discourage him last night, a few minutes before Linda had met Julian in Amy's office. But nothing could stop Julian now that he had permission to go ahead.

Celia Branson was a victim of pulmonary valvular stenosis. In other words, a tiny valve in her heart was almost completely blocked. Unless this valve could be made to work, there was no hope for the little girl.

There was a lot of preliminary work to be done requiring skill and precision. Then at last the great moment was upon them.

The opening had been made, the flesh turned back. Hardly anyone dared draw a deep breath as Julian, using a special kind of knife, stabbed it straight into the child's heart.

Everyone stood stiff and tense, as if turned to marble. There was a sudden rush of blood through the now-open valve. Julian straightened, raised his head. The anesthetist met his eyes with a smile. Quickly, skillfully, Julian closed the covering around the child's heart.

Not long afterward, Linda went to the office to answer the phone. She took the message, replaced the phone and then saw Julian sitting in a chair by the window, his hands over his face.

Without thinking, she went over to him and put er hand on his shoulder. "Julian, I'm so proud of ou. It was wonderful." There was a tremulous note n her voice which she couldn't control.

He took her hand and held it against his cheek for brief moment. Then he straightened up. "Some-mes a doctor feels—well, a bit overwhelmed." He ose. "But everything's under control now. And you ave the day off. No argument now. Run along."

She was dismissed.

It was a nice, clear day. To Linda's delight, Karen ame in at twelve. She'd been given a P.M. Julian aige had managed it, she said. Wasn't he a dear and darling?

A little past noon the two girls were on their way. They had lunch uptown in a drugstore and caught nother bus at Main and Madison, which took them o the county line. From there they had to walk, but am Davis' house was only a little way beyond the ne in Prairie County.

Even in her worst fears, Linda hadn't expected nything like this. The tumble-down house, the eeds, and little Betsy sitting on the rickety porch, ooking forlorn and unkempt.

Linda heard Karen draw a sharp breath. "Oh, no -no," she was saying as they walked up to the porch. "Betsy, Betsy, darling!" Linda cried, and lifted etsy up in her arms. The child at once put her hands n Linda's face, then laid her little head on her shoul-er with a long-drawn sigh.

Karen was sobbing under her breath. "We can't ke this, Karen. We can't. She's sick again. Her hands re burning with fever."

A tall, thin woman came around the house, fol-wed by four children of various ages. Two were essed fairly neatly, the other two were much in eed of a bath.

They all stared at the two girls with wide, puzzled eyes. Finally the mother asked, "Did you come to git Betsy?"

"Yes," Karen said quickly.

"I'm powerful glad. She cries all the time. I think she's got something wrong with her stummick. She throws up her food."

"Don't you give her the formula?" Linda asked, feeling panic-stricken.

"She's gotta eat what the other kids eat. It's hard enough to keep them fed. We don't have no money for fancy foods."

Linda and Karen couldn't speak for the sudden horror that had come over them. No wonder Betsy was feverish again. . . .

"I'm right glad you got here today," the woman went on. "We're leaving right away for Californy just as soon as Sam gits the old car to going."

"Then we'll just take Betsy and go." Karen found her voice quickly. "Come on, Linda. No use staying here now."

Linda was trying to think. They couldn't leave Betsy. They just couldn't. She needed every possible care and they could give it to her. She said, "Will you get Betsy's coat and cap? She needs something besides this sweater."

The woman looked confused. "The coat—I don't know where—" She broke off. Sam Davis was coming around the corner of the house. "The flivver's ready," he said. Then he turned his head, saw the two girls, and greeted them politely.

"They came to get Betsy," his wife told him. "Like I told them, we got all the trouble we need right now."

Sam shook his head slowly. "Them women said it was the law for me to keep her. I ain't aimin' to git in trouble with the law."

"But, Mr. Davis, Betsy's not well. Please, please let take her. You know we'll take good care of her." aren's voice was choked with pleading.

"I know that, but we ain't goin' agin the law," the an said stubbornly.

Karen kept on pleading, but it did no good.

"Go git the baby," the wife told her husband, then rned to Linda. "Gimme the child. I wish to good-ss you could take her."

She reached for Betsy and the child clutched fran-cally at Linda.

"Come on, Betsy. You got to go. You got to," the oman said, and practically tore Betsy from Linda's ms.

Sam Davis came back with the baby wrapped in a anket and the family disappeared around the ouse.

Linda and Karen stood stock-still for a moment, en they turned and walked slowly to the bus stop er the county line. Neither of them could have oken. They were too choked with tears.

It was after five when they got to the cottage.

They had just gone in the house when Linda heard lian's voice outside. She hurried out on the porch d Julian stepped up beside her.

"How is Betsy? You brought her back with you, dn't you?"

Linda turned away without speaking, and suddenly e flood of tears could be held back no longer. She as shaking with sobs.

Julian's arms went around her and he held her ose against his shoulder. "Go on, dear," he said ftly. "Cry it out. Then we'll talk."

"Oh, Julian, it was awful, awful!" Linda sobbed.

Julian took out his handkerchief, lifted her head d wiped her eyes. "Awful? In what way?"

But a fresh torrent of tears had started.

"Here, let's sit in the swing a minute." They sa down, Julian's arm still around her.

At last Linda's tears began to subside. "I'm sorr Julian," she apologized. "You see, Betsy's sick agai and hungry. She's so pitiful it would break your hea to see her."

"And you didn't bring her back with you?"

"How could we? Mr. Davis said it would be again the law."

"But didn't you tell him you were going to hav the law on your side?"

"How could we?"

"Aren't you going to marry Phil and adopt th child? That's what Phil told me. Isn't it true?"

Linda sat up, astonished. "But—but—" she stam mered. Phil certainly couldn't have dreamed tha she'd said yes to his proposal.

"Go on. Tell me." Julian's voice was suddenly im patient. "Can't you see I've been slowly going crazy!

"Phil was just a little premature. He has a way taking things for granted. But I never said I'd mar him."

She heard Julian mutter something under h breath. It sounded like "Thank heaven." Then h began talking briskly. "Linda, you go to bed and g some rest. Will you promise me to stop crying an try to have faith that things will come out all right!

"Yes, Julian," she said softly.

Julian leaned over and kissed her lightly on th forehead. "Good night, my dear. I'm going to have very busy night."

He was gone swiftly. Linda sat there for a lon time without moving, feeling as if it had all been dream. Then Karen called and asked if she wasn freezing out there, and Linda went in, walking like sleepwalker. Julian had thought she'd gone to g Betsy because she was going to marry Phil, and th

were going to adopt her. And Julian had held her in his arms and had kissed her because she was crying. That was the only reason. Or was it?

Could he have possibly held her in his arms so tenderly and kissed her because he— A sudden little voice inside her warned, "Wake up, Linda. You're dreaming."

Linda felt tired the next morning, but she had slept more than she'd expected to. She doubted if Karen had slept at all, for she looked almost haggard.

It was a long day, but not a very hard one.

Miss Dinwiddie, a sweet little elderly schoolteacher, suffered a heart attack, and after she was better, Linda had a hard time persuading her to stay in bed under oxygen.

She kept saying she had to get back to her classes. "Please bring my clothes, Miss Stephens," she insisted.

"I'll get a doctor," Linda told her. "Will you believe him when he tells you you're still too ill to leave?"

The stubborn little woman wouldn't promise. "We'll see," she said.

Linda went in search of Julian, but he wasn't to be found. Finally she had him paged, and still there was no answer. Where on earth could he be?

Phil was operating down on second. But Linda found Amy, and Amy found the doctor who was taking Julian's place temporarily. Or maybe it wasn't temporary, Linda thought with a little catch in her throat. Had Julian really gone, as he had sometimes threatened to do? She was afraid to ask Amy.

She and Karen went down to the cafeteria at six. Karen was going out to a late dinner with Peter Travis and ate very little, but Linda forced herself to have a good meal.

After dressing for her date, Karen came back into the living room.

"I asked Peter to marry me so we could adopt Betsy," she said. "That's why I started dating him in the first place. He flatly refused. Now what better reason could I have given?"

"Love," Linda said, a smile playing about her lips.

Karen was putting on her earrings. She screwed her head around to look at Linda. "He said he'd marry me only if I loved him. And the—the funny thing is, I think I'm beginning to. But he probably won't believe me," she finished a little dolefully.

"I expect he will," Linda comforted.

The next day Linda was in surgery with the new doctor for the first time and found him easy to work with. Then she assisted Phil in an operation. When the patient was wheeled back to his room, Phil asked her where in thunder had Julian gone.

Linda shook her head.

"He left without a word to anyone," Phil said, and added, "He must have expected to be gone for quite a while or he wouldn't have had this other doctor in." Phil looked thoughtful for a moment. "Maybe he and Evelyn—I understood that was all off." Then he shrugged. "What does it matter? They're probably married by now. The real question is, when are you going to marry me?"

Linda drew a quick breath. Then she told him that she wanted a different kind of marriage. She wanted to be in love.

"And you think you're not?" Phil asked sharply.

"No, Phil, I—I know I'm not." Linda added unhappily, "I'm sorry, Phil. I—I don't want to hurt you."

He gave her a long, searching look, then turned and walked away.

Linda started washing and sterilizing the instruments, trying not to think about Julian and why he had gone away.

But it did seem mysterious. Even Amy didn't know where he'd gone or why.

The next day Julian was still away. The big place seemed strange and empty without him. But things moved smoothly enough. The new doctor was very efficient and the patients seemed to like him.

It was late afternoon of the following day that Julian walked into the office where Linda was checking with Amy.

When Linda looked up and saw him standing in the doorway, her heart almost stopped beating.

He was back! He was back, and he looked tired, but somehow relaxed and yes, much happier. There was something about his expression that was different. He looked as if he'd found something he'd been looking for a long time and had thought was lost. He had very likely made up with Evelyn Delaney, if they had really quarreled as people thought. Was that why he looked as he did, his eyes so warm and bright?

"How have things been going?" he asked Amy, as he moved closer to the desk.

"Not too bad. Everybody missed you."

Julian turned to Linda and smiled. "Ready to go off-duty?" he asked.

She nodded.

Julian said casually, "Then let's go over to Jane's for a minute."

They walked out of the hospital. "Is anything wrong with Jane?" Linda asked. She suddenly remembered that she hadn't seen her for several days.

"Not a thing. Not a thing." Julian's voice sounded like a boy's. She looked into his face and even now in the half-darkness she could see the little smile

crinkles trying to come into the corners of his eyes.

They walked on, swinging hands, just as if—as if they were sweethearts.

The door to Jane's living room was unlocked. Julian pushed the door open and they walked in.

Jane was sitting in a chair, smiling, and sitting in her playpen was Betsy, beautifully clean and wearing the last little playsuit Karen had finished for her after she'd been taken away.

Linda stood transfixed, hardly daring to believe her own eyes. Then suddenly she sank down on the floor beside the playpen and, reaching over it, put her arms around the child. "Betsy! Oh, my little Betsy!" she sobbed happily.

The child reached up for Linda's curls and caught them in her tiny fingers. "Ouch!" Linda laughingly took the little fingers away and caught Betsy up in her arms. "Oh, darling, darling, this is wonderful!" She turned to Jane. "Does Karen know?"

"Sure. She nearly had a fit. She almost broke her date with her boy friend. But I told her Betsy would be here tomorrow—and you see, that boy friend of hers is going to give her a ring, so it's kinda important."

"Oh, I'm so glad!" Linda exclaimed, then she added, a bit chokily, "I'm so happy I'm afraid I'm going to cry."

Julian moved toward her, taking his big handkerchief out of his pocket. "Go right ahead, honey," he said.

Linda took the handkerchief and looked up into his dark face. "Julian, you found her and brought her back. That's where you've been, isn't it? How can we ever, ever thank you?"

Before he answered, her eyes grew troubled. "We won't have to give her up again—ever—will we? We can keep her, can't we?"

"I don't believe anyone will make any trouble for you. I found the family about two hundred miles down the road. The old car had given out. And worse than that, all those children are undernourished. The third child would soon have developed rickets."

"Julian, what can we do?" Linda's eyes were distressed.

"Here, I'll take Betsy. It's time for her feeding." Jane reached out for the child, and Linda reluctantly let her go. Then she turned back to Julian.

"I brought them all back," he was saying. "Took the children to the hospital and they'll stay there until they're better. Had to take Betsy to a clinic before we could start back. Her fever was high and she had an upset stomach. She's okay now, though. As for Sam —well, I happen to know a man who has a world of money, and does a lot of good with it. He's going to see that Sam Davis gets a job that pays a livable wage and a decent place for those children to live in."

"I was so worried over Betsy, I didn't give the rest of the children a thought. I certainly should have, I know, and I'm ashamed that I didn't."

"Don't reproach yourself for anything. Know what I found out at Children's Hospital? Seven sweet old ladies having the time of their lives." He smiled down into her face. "It didn't take me but a moment to guess who did that."

"One morning Karen and I were in church and a friend, an elderly woman, came up to speak to us. I told her about the Recreation Program, and she passed it on to the others."

"It's working splendidly." Julian took her arm and drew her out on the little porch. He said softly, "After all, I'm thinking it might be a good idea to get yourself a husband. Then this business of being afraid of losing Betsy would be over with."

"But there's no one—I mean, I can't—" Linda gave up.

"How would I do?" Julian asked.

Linda drew a quick breath. "You—you're teasing."

Julian took both her hands in his. "Look, darling, a doctor doesn't have much time for love. Even sometimes when he seems to have an obsession about a girl, he tries to write it off as a mere chemical reaction. But with you"—he drew a quick breath—"that was something I could never quite do. Oh, I tried! And then, when I thought you were going to marry Phil, I—well, I almost died. It's the real thing, Linda. I want you terribly, darling."

"You said a girl shouldn't marry a doctor," Linda whispered through a flurry of happy tears.

"Never marry a doctor unless you love him beyond all doubt and beyond all reason.

"And unless," he added teasingly, "you're a nurse and know all about doctors."

"I do love you," Linda said simply. "Beyond all doubt and all reason," she repeated. "And I have for a long, long time."

Julian's blue eyes met hers. He said, "My dear, my very dear," and then his arms were around her.

Nurses Marry Doctors

Besides being young and attractive, Julian Paige was a brilliant surgeon. He also believed that no doctor should ever marry. To Nurse Linda Stephens, already in love with him, this was not only an exasperating obstacle. It was a challenge.

Though Phil Manley, also on the staff at Bennett Memorial, was ready to slip a ring on Linda's finger, the pretty nurse could see herself saying "I do" only standing next to the handsome Julian.

What made Julian change his mind wa triangle—a most unusual kind of triangle.

AN AIRMONT ROMAN